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C H U M S .

C H U M S :

A Tale of the Queen's Baby.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1882.

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CHUMS:

A TALE OF THE QUEEN'S NAVY.

CHAPTER I.

NCE more we slide down the narrow hill pathway near Westfield Vicarage. It is well on in February now, and there is no slush; the road is hard and frosty. Neither are we enlivened in our descent, by the shouts of lady beaters or the shots of rabbiting males; but at the last turning before reaching the main road, we find the passage blocked by two men, who are finishing what seems to have been an interesting conversation.

As is the common practice of parties in our positions, we glory in eaves-dropping, and gladly take advantage of a friendly shelter to listen to anything of moment.

“ Well, my tulip,” said the elder of the two, who looks so highly respectable, that at first sight we did not recognise him ; ” “ Well, my tulip,” he repeats, and there is no mistaking Jim Lawrence’s voice, as that highly respectable, elderly man rises slowly and knocks the ashes out of his pipe ; “ then I tell the *truth*, that’s all. It goes against the grain ; *terribly* against the grain,” he added, sadly,—and who that knows that old man’s history could doubt it?—“ but you leave me no other course open. I don’t so much mind having to admit that the finding of the initials on the brat’s clothes was a slight invention of mine ; but it cuts me to the heart to have to allow that the girl you mean to marry might not be the daughter of a swell after all. You see——”

Armstrong glared at him, but with no effect. “ You see, there were a good many brats in that lost ship, and *she*—the girl you mean to marry, my tulip—might be either one of them, if it wasn’t for *the initials*.

Some blackguard deck passenger's daughter, very likely." Here he gave a malicious grin. "But I dare say she'll make a high class wife, and then, you know," he continued, as he relit his pipe, and hobbled slowly down the hill, "she's so certain to marry you when she hears your portion of the truth. Cock sure, isn't she? 'Morning, Captain Armstrong; I have a little—ah—business to transact at the residence of my —ah—dear adopted daughter."

"Not so fast, Lawrence; d——n it all, man, not so fast," said the Captain—or, to be correct, *Mr.* Jack Armstrong—catching hold of the other's arm to detain him. "Let's talk over the position quietly again. Here you are, in comfortable lodgings at Meshach's, everything found you, coming down here occasionally to see the newly-found Miss Ormby, who, I might mention, seems to know you pretty thoroughly, and looked upon by all those who don't know you *pretty thoroughly* as an honest,

respectable man! What the devil more would you have for one paltry lie?"

"I'd have *double* my present whack, as I've told you," said Jim Lawrence, stopping and planting his wooden leg fiercely on the ground. "Curse respectability; curse honesty; curse you *all*. D'ye think that at my age I'm going in for virtue and modesty? Curse virtue; curse modesty. D'ye think that at my age I'm coming hobbling down here once a week to get your 'liberal allowance,' and see the 'two darling girls?' Curse them! No, no, captain, I'm good for ten years of life, mark you, *life*, and I mean to live them in my own way; not honestly and respectably. Ha! ha! it's too funny," he broke off, with a satirical laugh, and Armstrong waited silently for more. "I'll be a swindler!" he continued, angrily. "I'll be a thief! a murderer! I'll live in a brothel, and die in a tramp's lodging-house, and who'll stop me, eh? Who'll prate of respectability then? *Curse* it, I

say ; it stifles me. *But, my tulip,*" and he lowered his voice with a devilish grin, "the rhino ; the necessary blunt to carry out my glorious programme ! I must have just double the present whack ! Just *double.*"

"I'll think it over," muttered Armstrong.

"And in the meantime, give me another tenner for this month. Thank you, captain," said Lawrence, seeing that he had made the desired impression.

Armstrong handed over the extra note, but said nothing. He was thinking deeply, wishing, aye, praying, that something, *somebody*, would rid him of this reckless, unmitigated old blackguard. Jim waited, with a cunning leer on his face. "You'll think over what I've said, captain, and drop me a line? Shall I look in upon the two 'dear ones,' and your *present* intended, to-day?"

"No!" thundered Armstrong ; "no, no, Lawrence," he continued, less angrily, "I'll

write. *If*,” he added, thoughtfully, “if I agree to your last demand —”

“*Request*, captain,” broke in Lawrence; “*request*, between gentlemen; or, proposition.”

“*Demand*, I say,” repeated Armstrong, fiercely, Lawrence shrugging his shoulders, with a grin. “Well, I say, in that case, it would be quite unnecessary for you to come here so often; in fact, in time your visits might cease entirely.” He looked towards Lawrence. If the old villain would only stay away from Westfield, how gladly would he pay the “double whack.”

“Certainly, captain,” promptly answered Lawrence; “of course we’d have to be very careful, and break off the fatherly intercourse *gradually*, so as not to hurt the affectionate little darlings’ feelings; ha! ha! Same address for the *present* will find me; morning, my flower;” and he jolted off.

Armstrong watched him out of sight,

then, picking up his skates, which were lying on the ground near where he and Lawrence had been talking, he entered the Vicarage gates, and, walking briskly towards the house, gave vent to the gay whistlings characteristic of the accepted suitor.

Mary and Maggie were the only young ones at home this afternoon. Dicky had sailed for the Cape of Good Hope in H.M.S. *Star*, nearly a month ago; and Vi was still skating on the village pond, where Armstrong, feeling tired, had left her, under charge of the curate, an hour before. Old Mr. Ormby was laid up with a severe cold, had not left his room for some days; and when Armstrong entered the dining-room, Mary was sitting before the fire, alone.

She closed her book directly he came in, quite ready for a chat with her future brother-in-law.

“When did you leave Vi?” she asked.

“Oh! Vi is so tremendously energetic, that she quite tired me out. Roberts is with her, and will bring her home all right. He’s a muscular low churchman, and enjoys it; I don’t.” He spoke hurriedly, and at once sat down upon the edge of the sofa, but quickly arose and walked to the fire-place, near Mary.

“You don’t seem very tired out,” said she, with a smile. “I have been wondering if Mr. Lawrence would come to-day. Have you seen him?”

“No; he could not come down, but I have had a letter from him. I have been trying to arrange that his visits should be less frequent. I fancy that they worry you, dear.”

“It is *very* good of you to take so much trouble about me. His visits *do* worry me, Mr. Armstrong—*Jack*, I mean,” she said, smilingly, in answer to Armstrong’s reproachful look. “I cannot either like or respect him; and yet we were together

for so long, and sometimes he seemed a little fond of me ; ” and Mary sighed. “ I shall never be able to thank you sufficiently for all that you have done for me.” For a second their eyes met. “ Why you *are* tired,” she said ; “ I thought that you were joking, but now you look quite done up ; over excitement ; you are worrying yourself about Mr. Lawrence, Jack. Take my advice, and lie down for an hour.” She was looking into the fireplace as she spoke, and did not move again until he stood in front of her.

“ You asked me a couple of months ago how you could thank me sufficiently for what I then did for you,” he said, speaking low, and not looking at her.

“ And you have something for me to do ? I *am* so glad,” cried Mary. “ What is it ? Slippers ? Smoking cap ? What is it to be, sir ? ”

He turned towards her, but seemed not to have heard what she said, for he spoke

again in low, earnest tones, the tones of a man struggling with strong excitement.

“And now,” he said, “you tell me that you are afraid that you shall never be able to thank me sufficiently; Mary, do you mean it?”

“Of course I mean it,” she said, simply. “But what is it to be? Oh, I see, you want my services as mediator; *that* accounts for your tired-out and worried look. A slight difference of opinion between you and Vi; and I am to make myself useful. Very well; these things will happen.” She laughed merrily at the man who was engaged to her sister. “But, do lie down, Jack,” she continued; “Vi will be back directly, and then we shall all have to be awake and lively, or we shall catch it.”

“I am *not* tired,” he said, standing close by her, and looking at her for a moment, almost fiercely. “I *am* over excited, as

you call it, I admit. Mary, do you not know; can you not guess, why?" Even then she might not have understood his meaning, but, as he finished speaking, his hand closed upon her wrist, and he leant forward until his lips nearly touched hers. For the *second* time, although she knew it not, she evaded his kiss. She had allowed him to take, had rather *liked* him to take, the usual salute of a future brother-in law; but this was very different; this was no cold salute, and she shrank back with a frightened, bewildered cry, as he knelt beside her, his arm around her waist, his voice in passionate, pleading tones, excusing, and, as he thought, justifying his love.

Ardently he pleaded on, but, after that first shocked cry, she showed no sign of hearing him; his paltry excuses ceased, and turning her face—which lay half hidden, and pressed against the arm chair—towards him, he found that he might have spared

himself the trouble of both excuses and justifications. She had fainted.

You that are strong-minded of “ women’s rights ” proclivities, don’t be too hard upon the poor, weak-minded little fool !

You that are affectionate, tender-hearted, pity her ! Understand her ! Armstrong—though scarcely of the latter class—understood well. Understood that—*mistaking* her bright kindness and sisterly affection—he had failed utterly; understood, at last, what it would be well if many another man of his stamp understood—that there are girls *and* girls.

He must wait and explain it away ; “ her fainting will make that easy enough ; with the help of a lie or two,” he thought, as he drew back, and watched her silently for a few moments. Then, his passionate, reckless love, blazing forth—as such love will—more fiercely, more wildly, as he gazed on its *helpless* object, he held back no longer. What could stop him now ? On this, his

third attempt, there could be no repulse. His lips met hers again and again, until fear of her too sudden return to consciousness made him lay her head back once more upon the chair. As he did so, a sound of scuffling feet behind him made him draw back again quickly, and turn round. Standing by the open door, half laughing, half frightened, at having caught Uncle Jat and Mammy "all alone, and tissing each other heaps of times," was that inquisitive, know-all child, *his* child, Maggie. With a smothered curse, and a poor attempt at a laugh, he was darting forward to catch her, when Mary moved ; he dared not be away when she became conscious, and Miss Maggie escaped, slamming the door loudly behind her with happy childhood's keen, vigorous sense of noisy, nervous enjoyment. It appealed to Mary's nerves with some effect, for she started up, and listened in a puzzled, bewildered way, whilst Armstrong poured forth a

string of explanations. Poor Mary! She tried hard to believe him ; was it not best to do so? Best for Vi ; best for her. Thoughtful for others ; used to trials all her life ; this was only one amongst the many. *So*, she believed him.

“ Poor weak-minded fool!” exclaims the strong-minded member of the anti-man’s supremacy association. And, perhaps she’s right. Outside that hardly-slammed door, Maggie stands, uncertain which way to run. She was not so very fond of Armstrong now, kisses and presents notwithstanding ; for, with a child’s quickness, she had discovered that he disliked her. The kitchen, she thought, would be an unlikely place for him to follow her to, but then that nasty old Jane would be sure to tail-pipe her, and hand her over to condign punishment, if *she* caught her. And Maggie’s horror of tail-piping was almost as great as her aversion to condign punishment. But the kitchen was the

nearest place of refuge, and just as she had decided on trusting to Providence, and the chance of Jane's having all the cloths in use, voices were heard outside the side door, and in another moment she had jumped into the arms of Vi, who had just dismissed the curate.

“Hush!” she whispered mysteriously, as Vi squeezed her small ribs and kissed her. “Hush! For *doodness sate!*” She scrambled down to the floor, and catching hold of Vi's short serge dress, dragged her to the stairs with one little hand, the other being employed in covering her own little mouth to impress upon Vi the necessity of absolute silence; and so they proceeded to the latter's room.

“I've got a setret to tell you,” was her triumphant remark as she *closed*—caution forbade the well-beloved *slam*—the door, placed Vi in her easy chair, and promptly mounted into her lap.

“Well, what is it, little nuisance?” asked

Vi, throwing her hat on the bed, and herself back into the chair.

“You promise not to tell?” said Maggie, as without attempting to wait for a reply, she pulled Vi’s head down to her. “I saw —” The necessity for caution was so great that Vi quite lost the intensely-whispered description of what the all-absorbing sight had been. She laughed, however, and said, “It was a good joke; capital fun; and Maggie was a darling.” But it wouldn’t do; the sight was not to be treated as a joke, and she was fain to admit that perhaps, after all, she had not quite caught the whole of the communication. Again the intense whisper, the unsatisfactory result; whereupon Vi ventured to suggest that, taking into consideration that the door was shut, and that in all probability, with the exception of themselves, there was not a single soul upon the whole of that landing; I say that, having taken these circumstances

into consideration, Vi ventured to suggest that it might be safe to indulge in an ordinary undertone.

Considering this advice to be unbiassed, Maggie waxed intelligible, saying slowly —as became the importance of the news —“I saw Untle Jat *tiss* mammy ever so many times, and she seemed to—like it. Wasn’t it funny of her, Vi, to let him *tiss* her before bed-time?”

“Oh! I don’t know, dear,” said Vi, moving the child off her lap and rising wearily to take her things off. “But, mind, dear,” she added, quickly; “you mustn’t say a word about it, not a single word, and now kiss me, and run away, there’s a darling!”

Maggie looked like remonstrating, but another “there’s a darling” from Vi settled the matter, and she moved towards the door. “You won’t be angry, will you, Vi, dear? Betos I’m *certain* mammy didn’t mind a bit!”

“No, no, dear, of course she didn’t. Why should I be angry?” The door closed on Maggie, and Vi threw off her hat and cloak.

“What can I do?” she thought, helplessly. “What *ought* I to do? That abominable Jack! I hate him! What I ever saw to like in him I can’t imagine! And Mary, too!—I *do* think—no, I won’t think at all until dear old Dicky comes home. We can jog along all right until then. Or, there’s Cecil; he will be home before long; I might—no, I won’t ask him; and what’s more, I won’t bother my head about it. Stupid old marriage, I hate it!” Having arrived at which conclusion, Vi pushed her hair into something like smoothness, and rushed madly upstairs to her uncle’s room.

Mary, looking pale and worried, was coming out as she entered, and for the first time since the sisters’ reunion, Vi could think of nothing to say as they passed one another at the door.

She stayed with her old darling, talking away in her usual high spirits until dinner time, when she was obliged to run off and dine *tête-à-tête* with Armstrong, Mary taking her dinner in Mr. Ormby's room.

* * * *

The state of affairs at the Vicarage is by no means satisfactory, but we are powerless to mend matters; so, loving Vi, pitying Mary, and d—ning Armstrong, we start off to the Cape of Good Hope, where we may soon expect to meet H.M.'s good ship *Star*, and, amongst other old friends, Dicky Ormby.



CHAPTER II.

WALKING briskly, in single file, along a rugged, narrow pathway, running around a hilly point of land on the western shore of Simon's Bay—a small portion of False Bay lying between the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Agulhas—are two of our old acquaintances, Dicky Ormby and Barnaby the Slug.

They started at about ten o'clock this morning to walk to an ostrich farm, situated, they have been told, about twelve or fourteen miles from Simon's Town, and which, therefore, they expect to reach at something before two p.m., thus giving themselves ample time to get food, see all that there is to be seen, and be on board

again before very late. The evenings are long in March.

H.M.S. *Star* is lying at anchor within half a mile of Commodore Le Hunte's house. She arrived a few days ago, having stopped on her passage from Portsmouth, at St. Vincent, to coal; and the commodore has just settled into his shore quarters. Mrs. Le Hunte and children came out by mail, so Admiralty House is full of life.

The little town, too, stretching across the inner shore of the Bay, can boast of plenty of life; not much in the way of shops, certainly, but victuals can easily be obtained from Cape Town—about eighteen miles off—and then there is the naval club, comprising one billiard table, a reading room, and an irreproachable bar; and there is a Royal dockyard, in a pretty corner, close to the commodore's garden and flagstaff, with plenty of stores and a storekeeper with a small income and few

h's, but a daughter who, at the Flag-ship's ball, can hold her own against all the beauties "up the road." Pretty girls those latter, too, with hospitable fathers, and—well—deserving mothers living and blooming in Wynberg and Rosenberg, Claremont and Randebosch, prettiest of rural villages, most delightful of climates; and we might do worse than take a run "up the road." But *the* road is not the rugged path towards the ostrich farm, and Dicky and the Slug are still stepping out briskly.

They had walked some six or seven miles, and were now round the point and out of sight of the ship. The path was not lively; they had passed one man, a mule, and a tortoise, since getting clear of the town.

"What a blessing it is to have a run on shore again, and get out of sight of the old craft," observed Dicky, digging his stick into the back of the Slug, who had

not spoken since overtaking the tortoise a quarter of an hour ago.

“I suppose you’ll pretend that you didn’t have a run on shore at St. Vincent,” he growled. St. Vincent was a sore subject with the Slug, as his watch-mate, the Nipper, had landed there, whilst he (the Slug) was peacefully sleeping; leaving him to look out for the whole of the afternoon watch.

“Oh, I don’t count that,” said Dicky, airily. “I wish I had let you go on shore. It would have suited you down to the ground; scrambling over mountains of coal, and sitting on a jagged stone at the edge of a well, watching negresses—and such negresses—draw water. It was a pastime worthy of you—or Jacob. Do get on, Slug. What’s up?”

Barnaby had just turned the corner of a large rock overhanging the path, and had immediately stopped short, turned sharp round on Dicky—thereby nearly rolling

him over the perpendicular hill-side—and was now wildly endeavouring to scale the cliff overhead. This feat was utterly impossible, but it gave Dicky a chance of getting past him, and looking round the rock. A far from pleasant sight met him. Running, bounding along the narrow path, and now not more than fifty yards distant, came a whole troop of baboons; the nearest ones, the leaders, big as mastiffs, and looking much fiercer, and some thirty or forty more of gradually diminishing size bringing up the rear. From their innocent, unembarrassed gambols, it was plain that they had not observed the Slug, and Dicky drew back hastily, also unseen. Barnaby having proved to himself that he lacked the necessary qualifications for surmounting, unassisted, an almost perpendicular cliff, was for making a bolt, but Dicky knew that the baboons could catch them up in a very few minutes, and that it would be wiser to face them. They *couldn't* climb

the cliff, and if the baboons *wouldn't*, why *they* would have to be rolled a few hundred feet down the precipice. It was a little awkward ; the brutes looked so savage, and there were such a lot of them ! However, Dicky handled his stick manfully, as became the leader of a forlorn hope ; whilst his comrade, the hopeless and most forlorn Slug—having now placed himself carefully in the rear—prepared to sell his life dearly, determined, in his own cunning mind, to choke them off with Dicky, if possible, and so effect a safe retreat himself.

Scarcely had Dicky time to whisper, “Mind you yell like mad, Slug, as the beggars come in sight,” when the leaders of the troup, bounding along on their hind legs, turned the corner.

With desperate will the yell was given, and the next moment Dicky licked the dust in fits of laughter ; the remnant of the forlorn hope rubbed his completely bewildered head, and looked helplessly from his

prostrate front rank man to the chattering, coughing, barking chacmas, or pig-faced baboons, for such they were, now leaping wildly over the rocks above them.

It took the Nipper some minutes to recover from the effects of that wild yell and its totally unexpected result, but then it had become high time for him to bestir himself.

The Slug, failing to see any joke in the business, had determined on having revenge for his fright, and had, accordingly, thrown a large stone at an elderly female, who, seated on the rock just above them, annoyed him beyond measure by barking and grinning delightedly, and encouraging her baby-in-arms—all the youngsters had been caught up by their mothers—to do the same. The sin of the too demonstrative mother was visited upon that baboon child, for the stone hit it on the back of the head, obliging it to cough just once more and yield up the ghost.

One baboon the less! Rather satisfactory than otherwise; but one stone-thrower was a trifle put out when the elderly female picked up his projectile and threw it back with much precision, hitting him on the leg. To take up several more stones, and throw them in quick succession and with varying success at that baboon matron, was simple but very *up-hill* work, and Barnaby had just decided that, under the circumstances, his honour was satisfied, when a perfect volley of stones, shells, and rolling rocks innumerable, came down the cliff.

About this time the Nipper speedily recovered, the barking and screaming overhead grew deafening, and there was nothing to be done but make a run for it. For nearly a mile they rushed along the road, the chacmas keeping up a storm of stones all around them. Then the narrow path ended, and in a few minutes more they would have been clear of the cliffs

and in the open plain. Neither of them had received more damage than a sharp hit or two about the legs and arms, but as they struck away from the path a baboon, some little distance ahead of them, shoved a large piece of loose rock down, which caught poor Dicky on the head and knocked him over, just as the pig-faced ones made off far up the mountain.

Very bewildered was the Slug as Dicky staggered to his feet, the blood trickling down his face from an ugly scalp wound.

Together they bandaged it up with a handkerchief of Vi's own marking, and then marched on again, Dicky feeling rather faint and with an awful headache, the sun pouring down upon them fiercely. It was nearly one o'clock and no sign of habitation.

After rounding the point and striking off into the small beaten track which they had been told to follow, they had been led inland, through one of the numerous

valleys of sand and shrubs, and along this they had tramped for about five straight miles, tired and morose.

“Hang the infernal ostriches!” growled the Slug, as they at last came to a bend in the valley, and found, on turning it, that the sand and shrubs continued, without a vestige of farm. “I wish we'd walked the other way,” he continued, “we should have been at Farmer Peck's long ago.” Dicky groaned and pulled up short for a minute to shake the sand out of his shoes.

Farmer Peck's, reader, is the well-known half-way house between Simon's Town and Wynberg, and in it the best of good cheer, solid and otherwise, is to be obtained. A story goes that, long ago, before you or I were on the stocks, or even thought about, four midshipmen of that olden time, riding from Cape Town, stopped awhile at Farmer Peck's and partook of the farmer's entertainment for

man and beast. They ate of the plumpest, they drank of the choicest, but—they had been doing ditto at Cape Town and again at Wynberg; the result, on leaving the latter place, having been almost total impecuniosity. This, however, affected their appetites not one bacon or egg, and their rural meal over, placing one copper less than the proverbial and most truly comprehensive twopence in the hand of the worthy farmer, they would fain have departed, assuring him that when they returned next day they would pay him the remainder.

But mine honest farmer had made enquiries, as was his vigilant wont, concerning the time at which their ancient wooden wall would sail, and had discovered that day-break *next day* would see her on her way to “ye merrie England;” so, with every wish to trust implicitly those four good old midshipmen, he felt assured in his own provident Dutch mind that

they said this knowing full well that he should see their good old faces no more. Having, then, this knowledge, and too great a respect for their cloth to treat it disagreeably, he hit upon the following expedient to obtain his money's worth:—

The wide portals of the farm, and the wide body of their portly mistress had long languished for a larger signboard than was at present theirs. A new board, indeed, of monstrous area was forthcoming ; but the sign—the symbol of all the Pecks and for all the peckish—was wanting. Our somewhat illiterate farming publican decided, then, that by this same token he would obtain satisfaction. Placing paint, brushes, and the *board* before his debtors, he explained that their first cunning device—to *cheat* the house—having failed, he would be glad if they would exercise their cunning to devise a second one, which should *attract* customers. Nothing loath,

our four good old friends set to work—merely stipulating copious beer—and ere long the massy board was embellished with four lines of poetry, in four magnificent languages ; each good old middy having taken one, and each line containing a delicate compliment, such as—

“Here you may rest as long as you please ;
Entertainment, without any fleas.”

Mutually pleased, mine honest farmer and his sign painters parted, the entrance porch and the breadthy matron languished no longer, and the signboard with the strange device may be seen to this day ; it has not passed away, and in the droughty weather, which so often obtains in those parts, no one dreams of passing *it*—unwetted. But where are the devisers and executors, the four middies of the good old school ? For news of them, with their proven sagacity, ready wit, and—what shall we call it?—good Samaritanism, we must e'en turn to the active list of

admirals, and there—if still alive—we should find their good old names, with the comfortable device G.S.P. inscribed against them.

But for us, the sandy soil.

“I’m precious hungry, too,” said Dicky. “I believe I could *go* one of those poisonous toad fish. But let’s rest a bit, Slug.”

They sat down for ten minutes, and the Slug suggested that they should give up the ostrich farm, and go back; but Dicky was by no means equal to that! he was tired and faint, his head throbbed unceasingly, and he would rather sleep where he was, than attempt to return that night on foot. It was four o’clock when they started on again, dragging themselves wearily along for another five miles.

“Hurrah, Ormby! there must be a house there,” cried Barnaby, as a dense compact mass of vegetation came in sight. They dug out boldly for it, and reached the out-

skirts of a rough viney ; but no house was visible ; and, thoroughly disheartened, Dicky —without attempting to explore further—stretched himself on the ground near the vines ; and the Slug, seating himself disconsolately by him, looked in wonderment around.

Far away, over the smoke of Cape Town chimneys, rose the Table Mountain ; its cloudy cloth rolling along its four miles of majestic wall-like surface, now hanging high overhead in fleecy clouds of vapour, now rushing a foamy cataract over the precipitous side and down towards the suburbs of Rondebosch and Claremont. Already the leaves rustled in the moist breeze, telling of the south-easter's advent from the chilly regions of the south. To the right, and much nearer, towards the lofty Constantia Berg, and far out to seaward, the Slug can catch a glimpse between the hills of the Cape of Good Hope lighthouse, with Vasio de Gama peak to the north-westward.

Near at hand are shrubs and vines and fruit trees—everything necessary to tell of life and its comforts except the home, the habitation itself; and nearer still lies the Nipper, now fallen into a restless, feverish sleep. The only other visible animal life breathes in the myriads of ants and grasshoppers, swarming over sand and shrub, whilst not a sound, save the incessant “cr-r-r-eck, cr-r-r-eck,” of the tree frogs, breaks the stillness; not a sign of human habitation.

* * * * *

“And Jane!”—a lady’s voice.

“Yes, ’f you please, ma’am.” A country girl’s reply.

“You can take the tea table into the summer house this evening.”

“Yes, ’f you please, ma’am; and father thought, please, that maybe you could spare me to-morrow. Young William Crutten, the butcher, has drove over from Wynberg to-day, and he could take me back in his

cart to the barrack, first thing in the morning, ma'am."

"Very well, Jane, if your master does not want you. How is Sergeant Power, and your mother?" The voices died away; the speakers must have passed within ten yards of the Slug, as he sat on in amazed silence. To act on his own responsibility was quite out of the question, neither did it occur to him to act *at all*, until the voices were lost in the distance. Then he suddenly awoke to the fact that there was an *inside* to the shrubbery, containing people and creature comforts, and he jumped up, and with some little difficulty succeeded in arousing the Nipper.

There was certainly no entrance near them, and the latter more than suspected that the Slug had been, like himself, *dreaming* of home and women's voices. But at any rate it gave the stimulus wanted, and they walked along the shrubs until, some little distance farther on, they struck

into a steep path to the left, and descending to the bottom of a hill, found themselves opposite a veritable old back-door.

Raising the latch, Dicky entered, followed closely by the Slug. Glorious! It was the front garden of an English farm hidden away in the South of Africa. The low porch of the thatched-roofed house lay not twenty yards from them; a little farther back and yet lower down the hill stood the labourers' cottages, few in number, but neat and homely; outside each door small groups of men and women were seated, and garden, house, and cottages, told of English owners and English ideas. Still one thing was lacking, and its lack accounted for the stillness; no children exercised their own lungs in noisy play, or their mother's in angry correction. It was a noticeable, and not unpleasing feature, that absence of noise and mud pies!

Dicky felt *seedy*, *awfully* *seedy*, when he opened the door, or he would assuredly

have yelled with delight. Now, as he stood—the Slug well “locked-up” behind him—gazing on this unexpected change from desolation and discomfort, a large collie pup rushed from the shrubs above them, jumped on his shoulders, and joined Barnaby and himself in a playful—not to say dusty—roll.

The two boys scrambled to their feet, rather disgusted; a voice from the farm called, “Johnnie! Johnnie!” and a moment after, a rosy cheeked damsel of sixteen or thereabouts appeared at the porch, cried, “Johnnie!” sharply once more, and then with an alarmed, “*Oh!*” as she spied strangers, ran hastily indoors again. She quickly returned, however, peeping inquisitively over the shoulder of a tall, plainly-dressed, lady-like woman of middle age, who walked towards them from the farm, calling the pups. For several others had joined the affectionate Johnnie. The mistress of the farm—for such the Nipper

rightly guessed the tall woman to be—approached them quickly, and apologizing for the roughness of the puppies, asked if they would not come in and rest. “We shall have tea almost immediately!” she said; and then noticing Dicky’s bandaged head, she enquired all about it in a gentle, motherly way, that quite won the Nipper’s heart; and before they reached the house, she had learnt of their tiresome day’s walk, and they had discovered that, considering the roundabout way they had come, they must have tramped a good eight-and-twenty miles instead of the twelve or fourteen they had bargained for.

“Make tea at once, Jane,” said their hostess, as they entered the farm. Her very voice was appetising; and Jane, executing a courtesy of marvellous rapidity, murmured “yes, ’f you please, ma’am,” received sundry keys and instructions, and departed by a circuitous route to the back regions.

They walked through the passage, and, hanging their hats on the antlers of one of the numerous horns nailed to its walls, turned presently into a small room, neatly furnished, and evidently the sitting-room in ordinary use.

Two men were sitting near the window, and one of them, a sturdy, intelligent looking yeoman, immediately rose, and went out, bidding a "Good evening, ma'am," to their conductress, who smiled pleasantly as she said, "Good evening, Mr. Hart."

The other man, dressed also in a rough frieze suit, but as evidently a gentleman as their hostess was a lady, turned slowly towards them, and they saw that he was blind.

Upon his knees was a guitar, and in different parts of the room were at least a dozen puppies and kittens, who all hastened to greet their mistress. Stepping lightly past them, she removed the guitar from

the blind man's knees, kissing his forehead gently as she did so.

“So you and Mr. Hart have had your evening's chat, dear?” she said, signing to the boys to come near.

The man nodded.

“Yes,” he said, raising his head proudly, “my scheme is progressing. They will soon be *extinct*, and then sin and misery will disappear also.” The collie pup had jumped on his lap, and he fondled it lovingly as he spoke.

“That's right, dear,” said their hostess; and then, leaning over him, she told in low tones of the arrival of the two midshipmen; quietly and simply as she gave him the news, it excited him much, and ere she could finish, he jumped to his feet exclaiming, “Are you sure, woman? No trifling, mind; no evading the scheme. If not four years of age they must die.”

“Yes, yes, dear,” she said, soothingly, turning towards the boys with a sad smile.

“They are officers in the Navy, you know, quite young *men*. And now,” she continued, hurriedly, “tea must be ready, I’m certain,” and leading the man by the arm, she asked the midshipmen to follow, which they did, wondering greatly, the puppies and kittens bringing up the rear.

“Rum old cock, the blind man! Must be mad,” whispered the Nipper.

“*Don’t*, he may hear you,” returned the Slug, anxiously. “And perhaps, you know, perhaps he’s only *shamming*.”

“How do you mean? What on earth should he sham for?” said the Nipper.

“Oh! I don’t know; you hear of such dreadful things happening in these lonely places,” replied the Slug, mysteriously. To which the Nipper responded an awless, “*Don’t talk rot*,” and walked on in disgusted silence.

The tea table was spread beneath a couple of trees at one side of the garden. Their host—the lady who met them spoke

of him as her husband—seemed dissatisfied and ill at ease at first, but he recovered his spirits as the meal progressed, and each of the animals went to him in turn to be fed.

The two youngsters, as might be expected, required but little pressing ; but Ormby was subdued, and though he tried hard to shake it off, the occasional faintness and sick headache continued. Their kindly hostess soon noticed it, and wished him to have the cut on his head re-bandaged, and to go to bed at once ; for she took it for granted that they would stop at the farm for the night. It certainly seemed impossible for them to get back to the ship ; and they could only hope that the fellows on board would not think that they had come to grief in any way, and so be worried about them.

But the Nipper would not go to bed ; he was too restless, he said, and could not possibly sleep yet.

The lady alone had attempted to en-

tertain them so far; but now their host, as the last of the kittens received its food from him, exclaimed triumphantly, “*thirteen.*”

“Ah!” he continued, thoughtfully, “if mankind would only be guided by me! Why, in a few years, if my plan be universally adopted, the whole race of human beings under four years of age will have become extinct, and their places will be occupied by quadrupeds! No more sin and misery for man!”

He rose as he finished speaking, and his wife, who had risen with him, took his arm, and, motioning to the midshipmen to keep their seats, prepared to lead him indoors.

He had commenced to move quietly away with her, when the gloomy dissatisfied look settled over his face again, and, turning towards the places occupied by Ormby and Barnaby, he felt his way to them around the table. Reaching the Slug—who had

awaited his approach with intense horror—he bent low, his features working nervously, his sightless eyes seeming to the awe-struck youngster to almost gain expression, and blaze forth the excitement of his wandering mind, as he whispered: “Swear to me that you are more than four. Mind, no trifling; I can’t believe *her*.” And he pointed contemptuously to where his wife stood patiently waiting for him.

“Yes, sir,” said the Nipper, taking pity on poor Barnaby’s evident state of trepidation, and answering for him; “he is certainly four.”

“Yes, I’ll take my oath I am, sir,” hastily added Barnaby, edging away as far as he dared.

“Ah! that’s right,” said their host, passing his hand across his forehead with a sigh of relief. “That’s right,” he repeated; and the excitement died out of his face, giving place to a worn, suffering expression, as his voice sunk, and he

murmured in broken tones, “*she* was four, you know. God forgive me! *she* was just four.”

There were tears in his wife’s eyes, as she quietly drew near and took his arm again; and repeating in helpless, pitiful tones, “*she* was just four, you know,” he suffered himself to be led back to his room.

In very considerable astonishment the youngsters sat on.

“Perhaps you’ll say I talk rot now,” whispered the Slug, with a happy mixture of triumph and fear.

“You are an ass!” contemptuously responded the Nipper, and then, neither remark seeming to invite conversation, they sat on in silence. Presently, at the window of the room they had left, their host and the small servant Jane appeared; the former with his guitar upon his knees, and its soft music just reached them, as he ran his well-practised fingers lightly over

the strings. Clear and true were his notes, and then—the little servant industriously hemming a duster, and his young quadrupeds sedately squatted around, forming an audience—he suddenly commenced to sing to his guitar accompaniment :

“Wake! lady wake! from thy peaceful sleep,
And gaze upon the clear, starry night;
That now as dark shadows o'er me creep,
I may watch thine eyes so soft and bright.

“In many foreign countries I've been;
I've travelled far, both o'er land and sea;
And lovable damsels I've seen;
But not to be compared, love, to thee.

“Sleep! darling, sleep! through night's dreamy flight,
Angels from thy visions banish pain;
And when the sun on earth sheds its light,
May thine eyes beam on me, love, again.”

His voice ceased, and after striking a few more chords, he laid down the guitar. Shortly afterwards Jane withdrew from the window, and in another minute came out with a few lines from her mistress to say that as her husband was more than usually restless and excited to-night, she would get him off to bed before returning to them.

As they finished the short note, they saw her come to the window, and speak to the bent figure still sitting there, and which now rose wearily, and, with her help, moved slowly away.



CHAPTER III.

THE boys, left to their own devices, strolled round to the back of the house, and then down past the cottages to the ostrich enclosure, where they found Mr. Hart giving dainty morsels of old leather, nails, and gravel to the solitary cock bird—whose gizzard required stimulant and assistance. As the midshipmen appeared, the polygamous bird of the earth and his three dusky feathered wives—who were enclosed separately—changed their cackling to an angry, hissing sound, and Hart hurriedly retired to escape being jostled, perhaps kicked. And to be kicked by seven inches of well clawed toe, with most extensive leverage, is *not* a luxury. The appearance of strangers seemed to cause

so much disturbance in the Royal bird box that, nodding to Hart, our young friends turned back, and the pleasant cackling sound soon told them that the singular old file had resumed his anti-dyspeptic consumption of old metal.

Jane was hanging about the table when they again reached it. How servant maids will hang about when men are to be served; and Jane was no exception. She was of the genus "maid," species "of all work," and amongst *them* exceptions are unknown: they all "hang about" splendidly. She was young, though, this Jane; of rural proclivities, and possessed of that inestimable oddity—simplicity.

All unaware of the unskilled innocence of the rustic Jane, our man of the world, Barnaby, proposed to amuse himself by "chaffing the slavey;" and with that object in view—indeed close at hand—he administered a sly dig in its ribs, which was unresisted save by the quick rebound

of their plump covering, and a giggling, “Oh ! 'f you please, sir.”

Emboldened by his success, and in furtherance of his project of amusement, he enquired, jocosely, if she liked it, but was considerably taken aback when she giggled and said, “Oh ! yes, 'f you please, sir.” At a loss what to do in a case so entirely outside all his previously conceived notions of the genus, Barnaby exhausted his knowledge of the world and its chaff by a second dig at the padded ribs of plump rusticity, and sought refuge behind—what was meant for a knowing wink and an imbecile smile. Dicky then ventured to enquire, in a casual tone, if she had ever experienced any decided aversion to being—well—say, *kissed*, for instance.

This required consideration ; rustic youth not often preferring its osculatory demands in such fashion. She moved a step or two nearer, though, and, as an arm in some slight measure encircled her waist, he

gently suggested, “You like being kissed, don’t you, Jane?” Ah! *now* he spoke! There was a healthy, rural simplicity about that.

“Yes, ‘f you please, sir,” announced Jane. “They boys at Wynberg—father’s a sergeant in the 31st, ‘f you please, sir—they’m always for kissin’ me; but I only lets them after church o’ Sunday evenings; but *you* may now, ‘f you please, sir.” And Dicky, with something less than his usual alacrity, pressed the proffered wild rose-bud.

“And now, I’ll give *you* one, ‘f you please, sir,” loudly whispered obliging rusticity.

“Yes; all right, Jane, all right; some other time,” hastily whispered the Nipper, as the lady of the house suddenly hove in sight. Jane, with the pre-eminent sagacity of her species—rural and urban—burst into a succession of giggles, and ran away in deep confusion; but, luckily, her mistress

was too much occupied with her own thoughts to notice the rustic agitation, and silently approached the table.

“I am very sorry to have been obliged to leave you,” she said; “but my poor husband is always worse on the rare occasions that we have any strangers visit us.”

“Why, what’s the matter with him?” asked the Slug, with his usual and remarkable perspicuity. Their hostess did not answer plainly, and she addressed herself to Ormby when next she spoke.

“Of course,” she said, “you noticed his great liking for animals; he is as careful of them as any Banian could be, and, although it serves to remind me of his greatest infirmity, it employs him continually when his guitar is thrown aside, and that is a great blessing. Since landing at Cape Town, after our shipwreck, more than fourteen years ago, ever since the dreadful landing in the surf, when our boat capsized and his child lost her life, and he his

sight, he has been almost as you saw him this evening. The child was the only one left him ; he would have willingly given his life for hers. Can you wonder that under such great trials his brain should have given way?"

"No, indeed," murmured Dicky, as she paused a moment, and he would fain say *something*, however feeble, to help her through with the sad tale.

"That awful shipwreck!" she whispered, with a shiver ; then, checking herself, "But I forget," she said, turning her patient face and pleasant smile from one to the other of the midshipmen ; "it is so seldom that I meet anyone but our bailiff, Mr. Hart, that I forget how little my troubles are likely to interest strangers."

"No, please go on," said Dicky, earnestly ; "that is if you don't mind." Her smile thanked him, and she glanced towards Barnaby, who, venturing the appropriate remark, that he rather liked those blood

and thunder sort of yarns, opened his mouth, and otherwise laid himself out to be entertained.

“No, not to-night; you are both too tired,” said their hostess; “and *you* look quite worn out, poor boy,” she added, laying her hand gently upon Dicky’s aching head.

“No, no, I’m not,” said he, but he made no further protest, as she bathed and re-bandaged the cut.

Neither of them knew the name of their hostess, and she had not thought of asking theirs; but now Vi’s neatly marked letters on the Nipper’s handkerchief caught her eye, and she turned from them, and held Dicky’s hand in hers as he thanked her for her kindness, and said good night.

“Good night, Mr. *Ormby*,” she said, with a smile; adding rather nervously, “you see I know your name; I suppose that *is* your name?” and she pointed to the handkerchief.

“Oh, yes, you bet! That’s my name right enough; my sister made it pretty plain, didn’t she?” laughed the Nipper. “Good night,” he said again.

“Richard Ormby! and your parents, do they live in England?”

“No, they are dead; but I live with my uncle at a place called Westfield, in Sussex.”

“His name? your uncle’s name?” she cried, eagerly, and both her hands detained the amazed Dicky, whilst through the Slug’s brain rushed confused thoughts of murders done in lonely wayside inns and private lunatic asylums

“My uncle’s name is John Ormby, and he’s vicar of Westfield,” answered Dicky, politely; at the same time gently endeavouring to withdraw his hands. “I say, by Jove! Slug, she’s going off!” he added, in great concern; as their hostess, with a long sigh, dropped his hands and sank into a chair.

“No, no ; there is nothing the matter, I am not ill. But,” she murmured, softly, “it is wonderful, providential, if it should restore his reason ! Ah, if God in His mercy would grant that !” She sat on in deep thought, her face covered with her hands.

“May I call Jane ?” asked Dicky, in a moment or two, as she did not move.

“Call Jane ?” she repeated, “no ; why should you call Jane ? you are *his* son ; Richard Ormby’s son ; my husband’s son.”

Dicky stared at her in increasing astonishment. “Yes, Richard Ormby is my name, and *was* my father’s,” he said. And the Slug, having finally decided in favour of private lunatic asylums, called loudly, “Jane, Jane !” Not that he regarded the rustic damsel in the light of a possible strait-waistcoat, but merely by reason of no other plan of action suggesting itself at that particular moment of perplexity.

“It *is* your father’s name, boy,” rejoined their hostess, still speaking in abstracted

tones ; "I am his wife, I tell you ; and Richard Ormby lives here, blind and mad." She looked up quickly as she spoke the last words, and gazed at him intently ; but Dicky turned away. "Poor thing," he thought, "mad, too ! I suppose their friends pay that man Hart to lodge them and act as a sort of keeper ! But it's a precious rum turn out. What on earth should make her think of bringing the poor governor to life again, and making him keep an ostrich farm ? And she seems so jolly, too ! It will be an odd yarn to send home to Vi next mail." And he looked towards the lady again. She was once more in deep thought, seeming to consider that she had said all that was necessary for the present, and to be endeavouring to thoroughly realize the position herself.

As the maid came towards them in answer to Barnaby's summons, she looked up, and said, quietly, "You do not believe me, I see. Ask Jane."

“Yes. Thank you,” said the Nipper. “Oh, I say, Jane,” he continued, in a low tone, with difficulty suppressing a smile at the absurdity of the whole business, “I am told that your—that the owner of this house, is a Mr. Richard Ormby.”

“Yes, 'f you please, sir,” responded Jane, making her lowly reverence.

“Eh? But, I say, no humbug, you know,” said Dicky, regarding with considerable wonderment the youthful Jane, who, however, solemnly responded, “No, 'f you please, sir,” and *again* performed her lowly reverence.

“But it's not a common name, you know, is it, Slug, old fellow?” appealed Dicky. He couldn't make it out at all; “is it Mrs.—?”

“*Ormby*,” said his hostess, to whom he had also turned appealingly. “But do not think about it at all until to-morrow,” she added, gently. “It has remained unknown, unthought of, for fourteen years,

and may well keep for one more night. I will think for both of us; all *three* of us, Dicky."

"But what do you mean? It's not *true*?" cried Dicky, turning pale, as a first shadow of doubt forced itself upon him. "No; it's impossible; though it's curious about the name," he thought again. "That mad old ostrich farmer, eh? What bosh!" and he turned with a smile to Mrs. Ormby, and continued aloud, "of course the name is all right, Mrs.—Ormby. I hope you will not think me very rude for having been so astonished and unbelieving at first. But you don't mean to stick to it, about the poor governor, you know, eh?" He laughed nervously as he spoke; she was so quiet, so unlike a mad woman! The doubt crept over him again.

"Poor boy," she answered, sadly. "It must be hard for you to believe. I have seen many, many changes, yet I can scarcely realize this one. My son, Dicky."

She added the last words with infinite tenderness, but Dicky never noticed, barely heard them.

“I don’t believe it,” he said, roughly. “That man my father? *Vi’s* father? I won’t believe it. That miserable madman!”

“Oh, hush, boy! hush! He *is* your father, *Vi’s* father. Losing your eldest sister, Mary, made him a miserable madman,” said the pained, gentle voice, beside him.

“My sister, Mary! You know of her as well?” he cried. “Oh, God! It is *all* true, then.”

Yes, it was all true, though he could scarcely understand it yet, and he sat down helplessly, and tried to think. But after all, what was there to think about? His father was alive, and—mad. It was plain enough.

“How can I tell *Vi*?” he muttered. “Finding him like this.”

His step-mother touched him softly.

“Go to bed, Dicky,” she said; “we can talk in the morning.”

She was disappointed; surely he should show some joy at finding a father, she thought; and Dicky, all the time, was thinking, not of himself or his own feelings, but, “What will Vi do? How can I tell Vi?”

“You see,” he presently said aloud, but still in musing tones, and not addressing anyone in particular, “you see, Vi and I don’t remember him at all, you know. When we were both children, quite *kids*,” and the Nipper raised his head a trifle higher on referring to those bygone days, “when we were kids, Vi and I, we used to imagine that the governor had been a sort of king, you know. He was ‘Noah’ when we played Noah’s Ark, and he was always Vi’s best dressed doll, you know.” Dicky smiled for a moment, and added, “In fact, he was our ‘boss’ man all round, you

know; and now—now—God help us!” and the small, boyish head fell again wearily.

“So, because you find your father blind and broken down under his heavy trials, you and Vi would rather have lived on without him,” said Mrs. Ormby, rather bitterly. “If he had been a ‘boss,’ as you say, you and Vi would not have minded. Eh, Dicky?”

“How do you mean? You can’t know much of Vi to say that!” cried the Nipper, firing up fiercely. “But I’m blowed if it doesn’t look like it, too! If it wasn’t for Vi! Tell me all about it,” said he, turning eagerly to Mrs. Ormby.

“Won’t to-morrow do? You should be in bed now, I’m sure.”

“How could I sleep?” he asked, impatiently; “no, please *now*.” And his step-mother commenced her story.

“I had better tell you a little about myself first,” she said.

“It won’t take very long, I suppose,” observed the Slug, gloomily.

He did not as a rule interest himself in other people’s affairs, and had been left altogether in the cold lately; now as the excitement seemed to have subsided, and Dicky prepared to accept the statement of the private lunatic, he began to feel sleepy.

“Oh, I quite forgot; I beg your pardon,” said Mrs. Ormby; “Jane will show you your room, Mr.—a—”

“*Barnaby*; James Barnaby. Had the first watch last night, and was up at four o’clock this morning. Good night; you can tell me the story to-morrow, Nipper.”

Dicky nodded; and the hulky Barnaby, piloted by the trim little craftless Jane, rolled to his appointed haven of rest.

“Thank goodness!” ejaculated the Nipper. “Now then!”

“Well! about myself then,” resumed Mrs. Ormby. “My father, Colonel Finlay.

was in the marines, and both he and my mother died whilst I was still in short frocks, leaving me to the care of an aunt—my mother's sister—and the only near relation either of my parents possessed. I was the only child, and did not cost her many pounds; but she had no money of her own—she had been living with us for some years, and my father was not able to leave her much."

"Eldest son—cavalry; youngest—navy or line; poor relation, marries," murmured Dicky, suggestively. He was recovering a little.

Their father had married a lady in every sense of the word. Dicky could appreciate that; so would Vi, he thought.

"Yes, that is it, I suppose," agreed Mrs. Ormby, with a sigh. "After a few years—hard years for both of us—my aunt died, and there was only the one poor lady's occupation left for me. I went out as a governess. I was still very young, and

much too inexperienced for my work, but I intended to do my best, knowing full well that Captain Swifter only took me because my poor father had once served under him."

"By Jove! Why that must be my old pal!" cried Dicky. "He's 'Sir Robert' now; a regular big boss, you know. He gave me my 'nom,' and that's a precious hard thing to get, luckily for the service and the fellows who are so much thrown together in it. They can get plenty to choose from by sticking to nominations, and it's as well to have a decent lot of fellows to live in the same room with one, isn't it?"

Dicky was getting cheerful, and spoke warmly; he was one of the very many who were proud of belonging to the only service of the Queen which retained the exclusive nomination system.

"Quite as well, I should think," assented Mrs. Ormby. "So the captain has become

an admiral! You must tell me all about him and his wife and daughters some day, but I must not stop to ask questions now. Twenty-five years ago, when I was just seventeen, I went 'out to service.' They were all kind and most considerate; I could appreciate it all now," she said, wearily; "but you know what a governess's life is--happiness to many a middle-aged woman, to a young girl it is generally misery; a constant, insatiable craving for change, for independence, or else dull lassitude for the present; an aimless, hopeless anticipation of the future, a craving only for monotony and seclusion. Ah, me! perhaps it would have been better could I have at once resigned myself to the latter, but I could not—I could not! I need not dwell upon my life at the Swifters, or the wretchedness which speedily followed. When I left them, it was after being married from their house to a man named Dixon, of whom the less said the

better." She sighed, and hurried on. "We had one child, and several years after our separation—for it came to that, Dicky—I saw in the papers that he was dead—killed in a railway accident. I was at Barbadoes then, companion to an old lady—a great friend of your poor mother's before her death—and a few months afterwards, when she was returning to England under the care of your father and uncle, I came, too, with my little girl; indeed, the sole reason of my leaving England at all, namely, fear of my first husband, Mr. Dixon, was now removed, and I was glad to go back.

"You and Vi were just able to toddle about at that time; your eldest sister, Mary and my little Mary were nearly the same age, and a merry party you all were during our ill-fated voyage.

"All went well until we were almost at the entrance of the English Channel, then late one evening came the dreadful change.

I cannot pretend to describe it clearly, or how it happened. There was a heavy bump forward, then a grating and scrunching, as a huge steamer scraped along our ship's side, carrying everything before it. A voice from her called out, 'All right—all right!' and she passed on into the darkness.

"And do you know, Dicky, when we got to the Cape—as we did some few weeks after—I actually saw in the local papers that two ships had collided near the English Channel, and that one of them had shortly afterwards sunk, although, strangely enough, the master of the other—lately arrived at St. Vincent—reported that, notwithstanding his orders to make a quick passage, he would willingly have stopped after the collision, had not he heard some one hail, 'All right—all right.' God forgive him!"

"The brute!" said Dicky; "but the same sort of thing has been done since.

The masters are in a violent hurry; they make themselves believe that the damage done is slight, and on they go."

"Was it not dreadful?" said Mrs. Ormby. "It was warm, though windy," she continued, "and I was sitting on deck with my child asleep in my arms, when the bump came. The few men who were on watch jumped up, and were soon joined by the others, but they seemed to do nothing but shout and swear; the captain rushed out of his cabin, and gave some orders, and then the passengers who had been sleeping below, having recovered from the first shock of their rude awakening, burst from their cabins, and hurried on deck. Like frightened sheep they huddled together, and stared around as they came up, and someone commenced the cry:

"She's sinking! she's sinking!"

"The coward!" muttered Dicky. "But it must have been a woman!"

"I don't know; we were all dreadfully

frightened," resumed Mrs. Ormby; "and after that cry, all was wild confusion; dozens of people running hither and thither, without an idea of what they should do, where they should go. I was near the side, where one of the boats—torn away in the collision—was being dragged along in the water, and in another moment the panic-stricken passengers crowded forward, and I was pushed into her. A large piece of wood-work—a grating I think you call it—was close by, and to that I quickly tied my child; it was all I could do as the boat tossed about; then several more people were pushed, or scrambled into her, the rope which alone held her, gave way, and as we drifted astern, a large block hanging over the side caught in the grating, and knocked it and my darling from me."

Mrs. Ormby covered her face, and Dicky gently moved his chair nearer his step-mother, but did not speak.

After a few moments, Mrs. Ormby continued, with deep emotion :

“It was blowing hard, and we were powerless to help her. I was mad, Dicky ; I should have thrown myself into the sea, and been drowned—Oh, God ! drowned—as my darling was, but your father stopped me. Ah ! Dicky, you would not have been ashamed of your father, if you had known him in those days. He was our mainstay as we drifted about through that night and all the following day ; always with Mary in his arms, always hopeful.”

“Mary !” exclaimed the Nipper.

“Yes, your sister, Mary.”

“Oh !” said the Nipper, with a very perplexed look. There must be some mistake, he thought ; but he could ask about it afterwards. He could not think very quickly this evening, and the faintness was coming on again, battle with it as he might.

“The next evening,” resumed his step-

mother, "we were picked up by a mail steamer bound for Cape Town. She could not go back to England with us, but the captain offered either to land us at St. Vincent, or take us right on to the Cape, whence we could return by the next homeward-bound mail. Most of our party went on shore at St. Vincent, but a few came on to the Cape, where, as I told you before, we heard on arrival that our ill-fated ship had sunk."

"But she hadn't, you know," interposed Dicky, "at any rate not with all of us on board. We were taken off her on the morning after the collision, and carried into Falmouth. Although he does not seem to fancy talking about it much, my uncle has told me that there ought to have been no panic at all, and that it was simply owing to there having been one, that my father and sister were lost. I suppose it was the usual thing," added Dicky, thoughtfully, "no arrangements for

the passengers' safety in case of sudden confusion; no telling them off for special boats, and occasionally exercising them at their stations, as there should be, and as we do in men-of-war, where there is less chance of men getting funky; no care about anything but the comfort and quickness of the passage."

"I was not told off for anything, certainly," said Mrs. Ormby. "If we had only known where to run, or even where to *stand still* we should have been safe. But though, thank God, we have now found out our mistake, we never doubted then that you were all lost. The news had been telegraphed from St. Vincent, and the events which quickly followed our arrival at Cape Town gave me no chance of enquiring further, even supposing that I had entertained any doubt. Your father had been unaccountably restless and uneasy during the voyage down, and had at length decided that even if he heard of your

safety, he would not go back to your uncle, but would have you and Vi sent out here. For some reason he seemed to almost fear his brother. Well, Dicky, we heard the bad news, but before that he had asked me to marry him, and I had consented."

Dicky was very near her now, and he did not shrink this time, as her hand was placed on his shoulder, ere she continued,

"He had plenty of notes in his belt, and I had saved a little money, so we proposed to start a farm, and Mr. Hart, who was on his way out in the steamer that picked us up, agreed to become our under partner and bailiff. He had been employed on an ostrich farm out here before, the very one we are in now. But another and greater trial was in store for my poor Richard, and through him, for me. Our steamer could not stop long at Cape Town, and we had to land in a tremendous surf—you have seen

it breaking there, I dare say—our boat upset, and we were all dashed upon the beach, your poor father so much injured that he entirely lost his eye-sight, and Mary—his favourite, and as he thought, his only child—washed up after him, dead."

"I don't think that I quite understand," said Dicky; "*Mary*—my sister, Mary, I mean—could not have been killed; you don't mean that it was *her*?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Ormby, whilst Dicky listened with a bewildered air, "the poor little soul was killed. Your poor father lay for days between life and death. We kept his daughter's death from him as long as we could. He lived more than ever in need of a wife's care, and I married him before telling of his child's death. Do not ask me how the tale was told; its result, after another terrible illness, was to leave him as you have seen. I could

think of nothing better than to abide by the original arrangement; it would afford us the seclusion I wished for; and as soon as Mr. Hart had completed the necessary purchases, we settled out here. It is on the subject of age that your poor father's mind is so completely gone; it was Mary's fourth birthday when she was killed."

"But there's some mistake," again interrupted Dicky; "there *must* be. Mary was picked up at sea," he continued. And then he told of Lawrence having found her, and having brought her up himself without taking any steps to discover her parents, until forced to do so quite lately by Armstrong, when he had sworn to the initials M. O. having been on all her clothes, and she had been received as the lost Mary Ormby.

"He swore to an untruth," said Mrs. Ormby, gravely. "The child found, if he really *did* pick up a child, was not your

poor little sister. Could it, Dicky--could it have been *my* lost darling? Where is this Lawrence? Who is the man?" she asked, eagerly, starting to her feet, and clutching Dicky's arm as though she would have him guide her to the man at once --the patient, resigned wife lost in the anxious, yearning mother. But Dicky had already told all he could about it; he was sitting now with both hands pressed helplessly to his head, "played out," if ever a midshipman was.

"We'll nobble the beggar yet. What a beastly cad he must be." So much he managed to say, with the faintest sketch of a smile; and Mrs. Ormby, seeing how wretchedly ill he looked, forbore to question him further, and persuaded him to go to bed.

"It's been the rummiest day I ever spent, by a long chalks," he observed, thoughtfully, as he bade his step-mother good night.

“I hardly dare think of that last hope you have raised in me,” she said; “I should know my darling again, I feel certain, but we must have proof, too, and that man who *stole* her—for was it not stealing?—will have it, I *feel* that he will. Sleep soundly, Dicky; your father must be told, though I’m afraid he will not understand, and we shall have such a lot to talk about, such a lot to do, to-morrow.”

* * * *

But on the morrow there was to be no talking for Dicky. Many a bang on the head had fallen to his share; he had grown used to them; in an ordinary way, *expected* them; but this last one with the fatigue, and overpowering excitement which followed, proved too much for him, the volatile Nipper; and when Barnaby awoke from dreams of chaemas, private lunatics, and “cold pigs,” it was to find our little man—who had figured largely in his

visions of the night—tossing restlessly on his bed in the delirium of fever.

Mrs. Ormby's distress was great, and poor Mr. Ormby—satisfied concerning the age of the invalid—took much interest in him.

After a hurried breakfast it was arranged that Mr. Hart should drive Barnaby to Simon's Town, where he could explain everything to Commodore Le Hunte; and they were about to start, when the commodore himself, with a native of the town as a guide, Clarke the chaplain—late of the *Thunder-bomb*—and one of the surgeons of the *Star*, drove across the sand, having come by the shorter inland road from the Bay. The commodore had heard late last night that the two youngsters were missing, and had decided that if they had not turned up by the morning, he would start search parties, himself driving to the farm which it was known that they had intended visiting.

The astonishment with which he listened to Mrs. Ormby's tale may be imagined. He entered thoroughly into her desire to reach England as soon as possible, and at once offered to take the responsibility of sending Dicky home, even if the doctors should not think it well to invalid him.

The commodore drove Barnaby back to the ship, where the latter, until such time as he succumbed to his usual afternoon caulk, was—for the first time in his life—in great request.

Clarke remained with the surgeon to assist Mrs. Ormby; he, too, had been ordered to England to take up his appointment as chaplain of Sheerness Dockyard, and now, if all went well, would be able to accompany the Ormbys home.

All went well. With a constitution like Dicky's, and in a healthy climate like the Cape, it was only to be expected; and in another fortnight everything was ready for their journey. Mr. Hart had saved

sufficient during these past fourteen years to enable him to buy up the whole of the farm, so there was no monetary difficulty; indeed, the only difficulty of any kind was with poor Mr. Ormby, when the time came to separate him from his quadrupeds.

He had lost all interest in Dicky, directly the latter ceased to be an invalid. The news of the wonderful recovery of his brother, and his two children was broken to him very cautiously by his wife, she need not have been so careful. He altogether failed to comprehend either that Dicky was his son or that the girl referred to, as "Vi," was his daughter, and the sole effect which the story seemed to have upon him, was to re-kindle his old dread of his brother.

This, Mrs Ormby still looking at the bright side of things, considered a good sign; as showing that he could recall something of the time previous to his

favourite child's death, and his own affliction, and as holding out a faint hope that a *meeting* with that brother might bring back yet more of old times and associations.

Full of hope they sailed for England.

Dicky was invalidated, but not "for the preservation of his life," so he had to pay one third of his passage money home—a kind provision by a grateful country which has since been altered; and now the British tax-payer—which includes the naval officer himself, both at home and abroad—pays with all his generous heart, *provided* the disease has been "contracted in the service."

If the naval officer be not so indebted to the service, and if the naval officer in that case cannot spare the considerable amount of coin necessary to pay even a third of his passage from a distant station, why, the naval officer's grateful country will permit him to die in her service, on

that distant station, and will subscribe, with most prodigal liberality, towards defraying his funeral expenses. However, the naval officer has learnt to be thankful for small mercies, and the arrangement of not having to pay, “provided the disease has been contracted in the service,” is better than the “preservation of his life” plan.

It did not strike the authorities at the same time—whilst, in fact, this great concession was being granted—that the arbitrary rule making an officer pay one third of his passage money home on *promotion*, might with advantage be done away with. It did not strike them, although probably one at least of their number must have experienced the delights of dubbing up their third of the fare from the Pacific, Australia, possibly the China Station, after being presented with promotion and—*half-pay*. It did not strike them *sufficiently* at all events. But what naval officer is not

proud of belonging to the good old conservative service? If it is an expensive conceit through that identical old conservatism, especially in these days of big dinners and surplus men—but enough! “Full of hope” our friends have sailed for England.



CHAPTER IV.

N a certain rainy day at the end of April, there was great excitement amongst the newly-made dependents of “Old Court”—renovated and recently occupied by Mr. John Armstrong—anent their master’s sudden and unexpected announcement, that he proposed travelling abroad for an indefinite period, reducing his home establishment to a gardener and his wife. It was annoying, too, to the members of that lower tier, inasmuch, as a situation in the country house of a well-to-do bachelor, with a fully accredited and not immaculate house-keeper, offered a prospect of Elysian

servitude, which they might sigh for in vain under the fidgetty rule of a mistress, wife of an owner's bosom.

The fiat had gone forth early this morning, and had been followed by a month's wages to the discharged, ill-used ones, who were also requested to take themselves off with all possible despatch.

In the smallest, and by far the prettiest room in the house, the room which, in the days not long gone by, had been christened Vi's boudoir, and which had been fitted up under Vi's superintendence, though—as we know—never intended for Vi; sat that young lady's still *intended* husband. He had wandered there after his solitary luncheon, his packing finished, everything ready for a start for Southampton early tomorrow; and he sat in Vi's arm-chair, with his feet upon Vi's fender, and smoked vigorously. Smoked, and thought, and cursed, and thought again; for his

pretty plans had failed, chiefly through his early recklessness and his more recent folly.

Since proffering his love to Mary whilst still engaged to her sister, he had found it impossible to feel at ease at the Vicarage, yet he had been unable to tear himself away at once and for ever, from the real charm of Mary's presence, and to forego the chance, however small, of her reverting to their former friendship, and possibly, at last, admitting a warmer feeling. For some weeks he had believed in his power to effect this; for though Mary was evidently anxious to avoid him as much as possible, Vi seemed to be always finding some pretext for leaving them together. If he had not utterly shocked Mary! if he had only bided his time patiently, he could see now that even his wild hopes might possibly have been fulfilled; for it had become clear enough lately that Vi not only knew that

he loved her sister, but that she believed his love was returned, and also that—for reasons best known to herself and not too flattering to Armstrong—she would be very willing to retire, and allow her position to be occupied, as it appeared to her it should be, by Mary.

This was exactly what Armstrong had hoped, had played for, and had won ; but it was only one game in the set, and he had discovered, no later than yesterday, that in his second game, with *Mary* as his opponent, he had handicapped himself too heavily, and had lost utterly. She disliked and despised him with all her gentle heart.

Old Mr. Ormby was too feeble to notice anything, but Mrs. Monkton had shown signs of uneasiness at the decided coolness of the engaged couple ; and now Cecil was expected home very shortly. The *Tigris* had arrived at Malta several days ago,

and less than a week would see her in Portsmouth harbour. Armstrong positively dared not meet Cecil. If he had succeeded with Mary, as he hoped to have done ere the lieutenant's return, he could have afforded to wait and explain and lie; the man who had discarded Vi would be safe as the affianced of Mary, and all would have come right; but without that safeguard, to meet him simply as the blackguard who had played fast and loose with Vi, he *dared* not; and it behoved him, therefore, to go and expatriate himself. Having once made up his mind to "cut the whole concern," he felt little enough love for the girl who shrank away frightened at his most trivial compliment.

His great anxiety now, was to get over his farewell interview with Vi—in the manner most to his own liking—and to be relieved for ever of the constant and almost unbearable presence of his un-

acknowledged, too inquisitive, child. He could never go near the vicarage without meeting her ; of late it had seemed to his morbid fancy that she followed and watched him ; that Mary and Vi kept her with them merely as a protection against him, and that the child herself, *his* child, knew of her mother's shame and misery, and that he had been that mother's tempter.

“Curse the brat,” he muttered ; “she grows more like that woman every day. Perhaps, though, that is one of the special provisions of Providence ; it wouldn’t do to have her ‘taking after’ her affectionate papa ; Caroline’s hair and eyes, the same tone of voice and careless look ; for Caroline *was* careless ; she led me on. Intending at first to draw me into matrimony, the little fool forgot her own softness, and when she saw that I wouldn’t run to marriage, she gave that up and

went in for love alone. Ah! that don't last long. It served her right," he mused on, impatiently; "I was not a fool, if the girl was. She played with the fire, and so she's—gone to the devil, I suppose!" and he chucked his cigar into the grate, and looked at the clock.

"Time for the last interview," he thought; "for, by Gad, it *shall* be the last. I wouldn't marry Mary—bar all sour grapes—with that cursed child always turning up, for any money." And he looked round with a scowl, as if even here he expected to see Maggie's little face—with Caroline's eyes and hair—peering at him from a corner.

"I might have known it from the first," he muttered. "And yet, to be driven away by a child, with the likeness of a dead woman's face, the tone of a lost woman's laugh; why, curse it, I must be as great an innocent as the mother was!"

He finished with a hard sarcastic laugh, as he rose and left the room to prepare for his last visit to the vicarage, his last hit at Vi.

There in the old vicarage, gathered close around the fire in Mr. Ormby's room—he rarely left it now—were all the home members. The vicar, better to-day than he had been for weeks, was propped up in his easy chair, with Maggie perched upon a stool behind him, “doing his hair,” a not uncommon small-child's amusement, but one in which the present playground could afford but little scope for the hair-dresser; and Maggie, frequently at a loss for any more to “do,” would stoop to kiss what Vi was pleased to refer to as “her old darling's lovely old shiny head.” Vi herself was seated on the rug at the old man's feet, her cheek resting upon his knee, a letter in her hand; and Mary, close by, was knitting hard, and smiling at Vi's

remarks on the letter she was about to read aloud.

It was from Daintree to Mrs. Monkton, and had been sent over by the latter in the morning, to be read and returned. Vi, after pinching her darling's knee and threatening him with a rapid and awful retribution should he be rude enough to fall asleep, commenced the Honourable Francis's epistle.

"My dear Mrs. Monkton," she read, "Cecil feels seedy, hardly up to writing, and has asked me to be so kind as to let you know that we have reached Malta all right, and hope to be at home in ten days' time."

"Hurrah!" cried Vi, making a violent attack upon her "old darling's" knee, and tossing up a—it cannot be concealed—a most *dilapidated* shoe.

"Hoozah for Mr. Mont!" echoed Maggie. Mr. Ormby looked pleased; he longed

to have all his friends around him now; but he sighed too, and Vi, knowing what that sigh meant, took possession of the trembling hand near her, and pressed it silently; no need of words, no need of more than breath to raise the old, old, prayer, that "God would bless their boy;" and Vi continued her reading.

"Cecil's illness is not of an alarming nature; it's most discernible symptoms appear to me—an *acute* observer—to indicate clearly that Cecil's a scoundrel, Cecil's a humbug, Cecil's lazy, Cecil hates all step-mothers, and don't see why he should bother himself to write whilst he has a very treasure in shipmates, whose good nature I need scarcely tell Mrs. Monkton, is constantly being imposed upon. I rather like letter-writing, but this is entirely between ourselves, and merely to account for the good nature of the *Tigris* treasure. The poor invalid—so different to me—rather

likes spooning, and apparently with other people's *plate*, unless he's performing a gigantic fraud on his moral rectitude, both on a journey out and home."

"What does he mean?" asked Mary. "What does he mean by 'other people's plate' and 'moral rectitude?' I don't think Mr. Daintree ought to write such things about Cecil—Mr. Monkton!"

"Oh, *Francis*—*Mr. Daintree*—is only humbugging," said Vi, laughing at her sister's modest shy at the too familiar Cecil. "Isn't he, dear?" she asked, turning to her uncle, who opened his eyes guiltily as she looked up and caught him in the act, and with a warning shake of her head, continued reading.

"Ask him," wrote the indignantly virtuous Daintree, "ask him to account for his disreputable politeness to Mrs. General Smythe, Mrs. Colonel Browne, Mrs. Major De Yonge and Mrs. Captain Robinsonne; *if he can!*"

Both Vi and Mary laughed, apparently with feelings of relief; although the former did murmur, “I knew it was that absurd man’s nonsense,” before she read on.

“But I make no accusation,” the magnanimous Daintree continued; “I leave him to the full enjoyment of a life-long remorse—undisturbed, uncondemned. *He*, the trespasser, thinks that you might like to know something of our doings at Bombay, as he has not written since the day the *Tigris* arrived there. The suggestion appears to me, to evince care and consideration for a step-mother, in quite an uncommon degree, and I propose adopting it. You may have noticed ere this, possibly have wondered at, my writing in pencil. The truth is, that I am compelled to carry on a portion of my voluminous correspondence whilst upon the weary watch; for I find that all my spare time is taken up in doing my work.”

“Ha! ha!” laughed Vi. “What a quantity of work he must have to do, eh, dear?” she pinched her uncle’s knee, and Maggie gently “combed his hair for him;” but the sole response vouchsafed to either attention was a grateful snore, and Vi, nodding her head hopelessly at him, resumed her reading.

“Reflect awhile, dear Mrs. Monkton, upon the iniquity of thus overworking the under-estimated, and—in Indian troopers—*underlet*, naval officer. Your heart has bled? Then, to proceed; should I say that I have *never known* curiosity, I should give you but a faint notion of my utter lack of inquisitiveness; but I *should* like to know, why our Indian pay was stopped and—though they are but the offspring of that first great sin—why even the subaltern in India drives his buggy, whilst the naval lieutenant walks? why even the subaltern in India drinks his whole ‘peg,’ whilst

naval lieutenants in pairs, question whether they can run to a 'split' one? These, dear Mrs. Monkton; these, to men serving in a fiery hot climate, and earning their rupees literally by the 'sweat of their brows,' are 'burning questions.' But I enquire no further; it is surely unnecessary for me to know why the naval commander-in-chief has a bungalow at Bombay, and an extra allowance of £1,000 a year from the Indian Government; and I never *thought* of asking if it is *true* that the commander-in-chief, who was honestly of opinion that naval officers serving in the East Indies did not require Indian pay, was also honestly of opinion that it was absolutely necessary, for an exception to be made in the commander-in-chief's favour, to the extent of the bungalow, and the one thousand already mentioned.

"It is true, though; at least so I am told; and to my humble mind does great credit

to the *sagacity* of the officer who so *honestly* opined.

“But this, dear Mrs. Monkton, is entirely between ourselves, and in order that you may the more fully appreciate the honest opinions of my frail sex, we spent some weeks in that — to a *naval* officer — most foreign of foreign parts, Bombay ; foreign to his ideas of hospitality, at all events.

“There, a man is almost ashamed to own that he draws his pay from home, and is, unfortunately (?), not an Indian civil servant ; there, a man drives to the band in a frock coat and high hat, with the thermometer at ninety-two degrees in the shade, and dines in tails at any temperature ! There, but I wax rude, ‘bas,’ as we say in Asia. I dare bet, without at all questioning the veracity of your gallant step-child Cecil, that he has been, let us say, romancing to you concerning my in-

fatuation for a certain Miss Effie Stewart, daughter of a certain Mrs. Stewart, both of which feminine certainties came out in ‘us.’ Do not believe him. You know me, Francis Daintree, simply *impervious* to the fond advances of your most admiring sisters! But, ah! dear Mrs. Stewart—pardon, Mrs. Monkton—Effie was all sweetness, all tenderness, all plumosity; a very God-send to the fastidious Asiatic mosquito—not that I ever—but never mind. I loved that girl—I mean, that girl loved—but never mind; it was *not* to be; and we did not entwine our heart-strings into one live woven net, that the world, the hard, cruel world, might grin through our meshes; perhaps, perhaps play lawn tennis over us and our court. I am sure you will be pleased to hear that my heart-strings effected an orderly retreat, and have sustained no material damage; and it will not surprise you to know that we are

bringing back nothing so sweet, nothing half so innocent as Effie amongst our fair—is whitewash fair? is paste fair?—home-ward-bound passengers."

"He's very nasty about the Anglo-Indians, isn't he?" said Vi. No remark was made in their defence, so Vi, wondering, with a laugh, if he included Blanche amongst the pasty ones, read on again—"Old Jinks—who had enough of India this journey, after a fortnight at Bombay—managed to exchange, or be told off for the dépôt, or something of that sort, and is coming home in us. A dear good fellow, but like many more of us, often unappreciated. He and I were busy smoking the other morning, when he took occasion to describe with much feeling, the misery which so frequently ensues from marriages contracted by our soldiers with the half-castes—contracted sometimes simply to retain their married quarters. 'It's not only

the men, be Gad,' he murmured, with pleasant humour, his eye-glass flashing a caustic glance towards a group of officers' wives who apparently 'liked the smell of smoke,' dear creatures! 'And I'd bet,' he continued, casually, 'I'd bet a gold mohur, there's a good many annas out of that rupee.' The old Indian pleasantry was of course lost upon me, but I noticed that one amongst that wifely band—an *English* (?) woman of peculiarly sallow complexion—looked indignantly conscious, and that her dear friends smiled prettily amongst themselves as she moved hastily away. The sallow lady's husband—Bombay Staff Corps—asked old Jinks next day to explain why he had *insulted* his wife; whereupon Jinks remarked, casually, that 'we are all brothers,' and that he had seen the young lady's *papa* when he was at Jacobabad some years before. Utterly irrelevant as this appeared to me, it evidently assumed quite

another, one might say *a darker*, complexion in the eyes of the staff corps man, who murmured something about Jinks being a good fellow. Would he have a drink? and would he kindly say no more about 'papa?' Jinks smiled, and said he would take a quart of the 'Very dry.' But this is mere tattle!—Give my special love to Vi."

"Well, I like that," cried Vi. Then continued to read :

"And Maggie. Remember me kindly to all old friends, and believe me, yours—very sincerely, Francis Daintree. P. S.—Cecil tells me that in your last, you expressed an earnest desire to know how Miss Dutton and myself are getting on. I have carefully considered our respective positions, and have the honour to report, that we continue to approximate but are not yet adjacent. Perhaps you would kindly mention this to Vi, and add that you have heard on the

highest authority that ‘‘Sevens, Ladies’’ exactly fit your charming friend, F. D.”

“Horrid little man!” exclaimed Vi. “I hoped he would have forgotten all about our bet, now that *I've* lost.”

“Is Miss Dutton very nice?” asked Mary.

“Well!” considered Vi, “she might be if Mr. Daintree married her, but at present she's not half good enough for him. In spite of all his nonsense, he's the best-hearted little man I know. The right sort, as the boys say.”

“He was very, very, kind to me when he came to our poor lodgings at Gibraltar with Mr. Monkton,” said Mary.

“Do you know, Mary,” resumed Vi, after a few minutes silence, and looking carefully into the fire, “I once made up my mind that you and Cecil would be sure to fall in love with one another.”

“Why did you think so, dear?” asked

Mary, gently ; the knitting needles tearing along faster than ever.

“ Oh, I don’t know, it seemed natural somehow. But I dare say it’s all for the best ; and I want to tell you, dear—I have been wishing to tell you for a long time ” —and Vi leant her arms upon her sister’s lap—“ that I’m heartily tired of my stupid old engagement, and I don’t in the *least mind your*—”

“ *Stop, stop, Vi !* ” interrupted Mary, in pleading tones. “ You are mistaken, oh ! so utterly mistaken. I dared not tell you before ; I could not be the first to speak, my own little newly-found darling ! ” her arms were around her sister’s neck now ; “ and I saw you suspected me, Vi, ” she continued, in a whisper, for Miss Maggie had looked up in surprise at her excited tones, and even the slumbering vicar stirred restlessly. “ But you never spoke, dear ; all these weeks you never spoke

about him to me, and how could I begin unasked?"

Vi was gradually understanding the position.

"What a muff I've been!" she cried, with great self-disgust. "So you never loved Jack, after all?" she added, giving her sister a loving squeeze; and then Mary, drawing the indignant little woman still closer, told how Armstrong had forced his confession of love upon her in the drawing-room, and how no later than yesterday he had appealed to her again to accept it, appealed more wildly, more recklessly than before.

"And Vi, darling," she added, tenderly, with an anxious look at the indignant little face, "I scarcely remember—I was so frightened—but I think he said that he should go away from this—this cursed place. Shall you mind, dear, so very much?"

“Mind? *Should I mind?* You don’t half know your sweet little sister yet, Mary. I was feeble enough to imagine that you loved him. Forgive me, won’t you, dear?” Vi broke off, with a kiss; “and *then*, you know I didn’t think it so very bad of him, but now — the wretch!” very fierce was the face raised to Mary’s.

“Listen! He’s come,” whispered Mary, as Maggie ran to the window, crying:

“Loot, Vi! here’s Uncle Jat,” and immediately bolted off downstairs to accord to Armstrong the welcome which we know he loved so dearly.

“I want you to play at ‘brits’ with me,” she screamed, as soon as he drew near the front door.

“Bricks be hanged,” muttered Armstrong, relaxing into an expansive smile which covered a multitude of succeeding curses.

He really *had* hoped to escape Maggie this time.

“Please to me, like a dood man,” she beseeched, as he entered the hall. “I’ll tell Mary that you’re dreff’ly tross, if you don’t,” she added. She had all the “long-ears” of her generation, and knew which sister she could most effectively threaten to tell.

“I want to see Vi,” growled the happy father, at bay. He cared not a rap what either of them thought now, and he would not be left alone with the child. “Where is Vi?” he added, impatiently.

“I’ll tell her,” said Maggie.

“That’s a good girl; and we can play at bricks afterwards, you know. With a hook,” he chuckled to himself, after an encouraging pat had started her away, as he fervently trusted, for ever.

“I must let Lawrence know I’m off,” he thought, lounging into the drawing-room,

“ or the old beggar will think his pay is to be stopped, and he’ll split out of pure spite.”

“ Vi! Vi-ih! Vi-ih-ih!” shouted Maggie at the top of her voice, as she gradually mounted to Mr. Ormby’s room, and finally burst open the door. “ He wants to see Vi, and he won’t play at brits ’till she goes down,” she cried.

“ Ask Mr. Armstrong to come up here,” said the vicar. His intended son-in-law was still a favourite with him.

But Miss Maggie was fully aware that if Armstrong came up here and commenced talking with Mr. Ormby, her chance of playing with him would be small indeed.

“ I’ve dot such a headate,” replied then that audacious young dissembler, pressing both chubby little hands to one side of her mouth, and running to Mary to be petted.

“ You disgraceful little humbug,” said

Vi, laughing at the child's irreligious method of escaping an unwelcome job. "I think I had better go down, dear," she added to her uncle.

She had no idea of allowing Armstrong farther than the drawing-room; so the vicar was disappointed. He was never allowed to have a chat with his friend now, he thought.

"As you like, Vi," said he, "as you like. The young before the old now; it wasn't so in *my* young days, but I suppose you are right."

"Of course we are," laughed Vi, leaning over his chair and shaking her finger, warningly; "and do you mean to tell me, you shocking person, that you never left grandmamma and grandpapa upstairs whilst you ran away for a dreadful flirtation with dear auntie?"

"I assure you, my dear," commenced the old man, but Vi cut him short with—

“We positively won’t believe you, will we, Mary? You young men were allowed to have things too much your own way.” And the vicar smiled deprecatingly and said no more.

“Put your hair straight, dear,” whispered Mary, following her sister to the door.

“Oh, bother!” exclaimed Vi; nevertheless, she paused a moment before the glass, then, fully equipped for action, she descended to the drawing-room and her sometime “intended.”

Armstrong was standing, when she walked quickly—perhaps just a little *defiantly*—towards him.

The whole thing, she thought, was very unpleasant and very stupid; and all those sort of bothers were best got over quickly. They shook hands formally, no attempts at loving greetings between these two; there had been none for some time past, since

they had both come to understand, that the aim and end of their engagement was not to be matrimony. The sole question of late had been, how long will it last? and now each saw the answer in the other's face ; it was *over*.

“Why on earth couldn't he write?” thought Vi, impatiently, as she sat down and motioned him to a seat. He had not written because he knew a clever, honourable trick worth two of that. It should be understood that the dismissal came from *him* ; *he* would break off the engagement, and therefore would have it noised abroad that she received him up to the last.

“I have come to wish you good-bye, Vi,” he said, abruptly, still standing up.

“Good-bye, Mr. Armstrong.”

Vi bowed slightly, and glanced towards the door, his news was so small a surprise to her.

“And you don't ask why I am going, or

where I am going, or—or anything about it!" he exclaimed, in almost *injured* tones. The absence of all surprise, sorrow, or even curiosity, touched his self-love, and annoyed him greatly.

"I know perfectly well why you go, Mr. Armstrong," she said, speaking quietly, but not altogether suppressing the scorn she felt for the man; "I have heard sufficient this morning to make me wish more than ever that you had never come."

Armstrong turned a little pale.

"That infernal old blackguard must have told about the child," he thought. "After all it doesn't matter much now. If Lawrence," he continued, aloud; "if Lawrence has been telling——"

"I know nothing of Mr. Lawrence," interrupted Vi, composedly; and then Armstrong knew that it must have been *Mary* who had spoken, and he could easily laugh at that.

“So Miss Mary has been telling tales out of school, has she?” he sneered; “one would have imagined, that her former profession and its *gaieties* would have made her tolerably familiar with *all* descriptions of love scenes, and stolen or *bought* kisses.”

Vi looked at him with immeasurable disgust.

“I thought you dishonourable,” she said, “even when I was so stupid as to fear that my sister rather encouraged your pretensions; now I know you to be a *coward*.”

The blood mounted slowly in Armstrong’s face, but he managed to laugh carelessly.

“Don’t talk like a romantic school missie,” he said. “You know very well that we should never have got on together. *I* did, from the first.”

“Then why ask me to marry you?” said Vi, wonderingly. She could not help feeling curious as to his motive for that.

“Why, my charming *fiancée*? Why, to sell that brute Monkton,” he replied.

Vi looked up quickly, but turned away again that he might not note her enquiring glance, or the colour that would mount, in spite of her. He was too quick, though.

“Ah, ah! *that's* it, is it?” he laughed, sarcastically. “So you are not sorry that we have found out our mistake? When did it occur to you to doubt the wisdom of your choice of poor, unworthy me?”

“Choice?” cried Vi, struggling to keep back a torrent of indignant words as she turned fiercely on him; “*It was no choice*; I never *chose* between you. Can you be absurd enough to suppose that if I had, our engagement would have been possible? No, no,” she continued, losing the indignant contemptuous tone, and speaking slowly and thoughtfully; “I never once thought

of Cecil like—that, until the evening that he left. *Then* it was too late; I guessed what a weak little noodle I had been, and that a mere childish fancy and wish for good things had seemed to my ignorance to be—love. I intended to stick to my promise, though,” she added, raising her little head proudly, and speaking in the old indignant tone, “and I would have, too, if you had not disgusted me; showing me each day more and more of your true character!”

“Candid and ladylike,” sneered Armstrong.

He would not lose his temper with the little chit, he thought.

“And now, *go!*” cried Vi, suddenly darting past him and ringing the bell. “Go *at once*, do you hear me? I hate you,” she added, passionately; the quick, honest temper bursting forth at last, beyond all tempering.

“Don’t be absurd,” said Armstrong, rather taken aback. “I don’t envy Monkton his wife,” he continued, with a great show of contempt; “that is, if he should ever be so kind and compassionate as to marry my *discarded* sweetheart! Ha! ha!”

“*You discard me!*” said Vi; and the little woman positively *grew*, as she slowly emphasized each word. “*You—discard—me?*” She rang the bell again as she spoke. “You entirely mistake, Mr. Armstrong,” and she smiled ever so pleasantly as she caught a glimpse of his intention in coming to her. “Jane!” she continued, when the door had been opened, and it had begun to dawn upon Armstrong that perhaps after all he would have done better to *write*; “Jane, open the door for Mr. Armstrong, please; Miss Ormby and myself are not at home to him for the future.”

Decidedly, Jack Armstrong had better have written his farewell; this was far from the discarding he had intended, and did not look much like *his* breaking off the engagement. Vi bowed low as, with a rather feeble attempt at dignity, he marched out before the servant. He could almost believe, he thought afterwards with an oath, that she laughed as Jane closed the door. He tried to make a commonplace remark to the latter, but Jane had her own ideas of the manner in which a young man should "keep company," and Armstrong had been by no means her ideal "young man." She, therefore, answered him never a word, and, scowling at old Alick who held his horse, he mounted.

"I won't go," he thought. "I'll stick to Old Court, and ruin the little devil somehow!"

"Untle Jat! Untle Jat!" screamed the childish voice of Maggie, from somewhere

high overhead ; “you promised to play brits ! Tome along, there’s a dood man.”

“Let go his head, you old fool,” growled Armstrong, his whip falling heavily on old Alick’s hand ; and without looking up at the house lest he should see the likeness he dreaded, he trotted quickly off along the drive.

“A old fool, be I ?” muttered old Alick, looking down thoughtfully at his injured hand ; then, seeing Jane’s laughing face—“There’s no call to laugh at an old man’s shame, my lass,” he added, sadly ; and he turned and walked with slow steps towards his beloved “cowcumbers.” Jane was his daughter.

“How can you think I *would*, father ?” she said, quickly. “It ain’t the likes of you that’s the fool this time, anyway, or that’s got the sack either,” and with many a laugh she gladdened his heart with an account of Armstrong’s dismissal.

“Master *Cecil* will be main glad, I reckon,” muttered old Alick; and his daughter, hearing, put two and two together, and a new subject of gossip occupied the minds in the kitchen that evening.

The rain poured down heavily as Armstrong rode quickly on to Old Court, *half* determined then, and—when seated before the fire in Vi’s boudoir—*half* determined again to stop and try to ruin the little devil somehow. But he got no farther.

The sound of the dead woman’s voice *would* ring in his ears.

“She led me on,” ran his thoughts, and by constant repetition he had commenced to believe them. “She led me on, and it served her right. I should be a fool to be driven off by her child.”

But he only *thought*; his orders remained unaltered and early on the follow-

ing morning he left Old Court, never to return—and sailed in his yacht for the Mediterranean.

Poor Maggie, finding that her appeal from the window had produced no visible effect, returned in much indignation to Mr. Ormby's room.

“He's a great beast!” she decided, in an emphatic whisper to Mary; and the latter, concluding that Armstrong had gone without the promised game of bricks, left her with the vicar, and went down stairs.

Vi was still sitting in the drawing-room, thinking over certain of Armstrong's remarks.

“Isn't it splendid?” she cried, jumping up directly Mary entered. “What *do* you think? He came to *discard* me, *me!* and I turned him out, my dear; that is, Jane and I did, between us. Not quite by the scruff of his neck and seat of his pants, as that

dreadful boy Dicky says ; but anyhow, *out* he went. Isn't it delicious ? " Vi laughed merrily ; it would not do to look sad about it, for Mary would be sure to think then that she had been to blame, and had caused Vi's trouble.

So Vi laughed merrily, determined to treat the whole business as a joke, and Mary, rather astonished, was pleased also, to see that her sister was happy ; and soon joined in the laugh, as Vi described, in her own way, the "last interview."

That evening Vi lingered over Mr. Ormby's chair after she and Mary had wished him good-night.

"Are you so very, very fond of Jack Armstrong ?" she asked her uncle, when Mary had gone out, and left them together.

"I believe that he is a good man, and will make my child a good husband,"

replied the vicar, looking fondly at his niece. Vi winced a little.

“And of course,” she said, seating herself on the arm of his chair; “of course you are *very, very* fond of *me*? There’s no need to ask that. But the strange part of it is,” she added, softly, her arm stealing around to his shoulder, “that Jack Armstrong and I don’t seem to be so *very, very* fond of one another.” She laughed rather a nervous laugh as she said it; the vicar did *not* laugh.

“Jack Armstrong and you not fond of one another!” he repeated. “But there’s nothing wrong, is there?” he continued, querulously, noticing her troubled look. “Why did he not come up to see me this afternoon? I forgot to ask before.”

“I thought it better not, dear,” repeated Vi, a guilty blush creeping over her face, as she plunged into a well-meant little quibble.

“Mr. Armstrong and I have mutually agreed that, as in all probability we should generally *disagree*, it would be better for him to go away, and so—and so—he has—*gone*.”

“Mr. Armstrong! mutually disagreed and gone! I don’t know what it all means!” groaned the poor old vicar, helplessly. “But if you have sent away that young fellow,” he continued, in another moment, gazing suspiciously at Vi’s red cheeks, “if you have sent him away without good reason, you have been guilty of a very wrong action; a wrong and cruel action. *Can* you give me a good reason, Vi?”

Never since Vi could remember had her uncle’s voice sounded so stern. Still trying to escape worrying him with the real reason, she conjured up a faint laugh, and said, “What an inquisitive old darling it is! Fancy having the nerve to ask young ladies for

reasons!" She leant forward quickly to give her good-night kiss, and escape more questioning; but the vicar drew back and shook his head sadly.

"Good-night, Vi," he said, turning his face away. "God grant that you may never feel the *want* of an honest man's love."

Vi stood quite still at the old man's chair, the tears slowly filling her eyes. After all, she thought, now that he has so unexpectedly roused himself, would it be right to withhold the truth from him?

"I will tell him everything, *quietly*, to-morrow," she decided; and pressing her lips upon the dear old bald head, she moved noiselessly away. So noiselessly that the vicar knew not that she had left his chair until the handle of the door moved.

Then he half turned to recall her; but no! "She *is* ashamed," he thought; and a

low sigh escaped, as almost unconsciously he murmured, “Vi! Vi!”

In a moment she was at his side again; her hands raised his dear old face to hers, and the tears fell quickly, though it was Vi’s own merry voice that spoke.

“Well, upon my word!” she said, laughing through the tears; “the curiosity of some young men is quite shocking! They won’t take ‘no’ for an answer.”

Once or twice the old vicar moved restlessly, but Vi’s arm kept him in order, and he remained quiet until the story was told. *Then* he placed his trembling hand upon her shoulder, and she held it there.

“I think, Vi,” he said, humbly, “I believe, if I had known before, I should have been granted strength sufficient to horsewhip the scoundrel.”

“I’m quite *positive* you would, you brave old darling!” cried Vi, giving him a great

hug. Then, after a moment's silence, she bent low and whispered very softly, "you will not doubt poor little me again, uncle?" And the vicar kissed his niece *proudly*.



CHAPTER V.

HE next day Mr. Ormby was not so well, and Vi, as head nurse, would not hear of his getting up. His memory was playing its strange tricks, and his fancies concerning bygone days were more numerous than ever.

Vi sat with him all the early part of the day, and not until late in the afternoon did she give place to Mary, and go for a run in the garden. Very little running sufficed, and she was soon pacing soberly along the lovers' walk towards the old summer-house at its far end, thinking for the hundredth time, and blushing for the hundredth time, as she thought, “What

could he mean by saying that he got engaged to me to sell Cecil? As if Cecil cared two straws," she added, tossing her dainty head with a show of indignation, seemingly forgetful of the conscious smile that *would* part and play about her lips.

She stopped at some yards from the summer-house, for "Tip"—the Nipper's lame jackdaw, and the sole survivor of all his old pets—to hop from his residence to greet her. A few minutes passed without a vestige of "Tip" appearing, so she stole quietly forward, expecting to catch the whimsical old fellow asleep, or, as had happened more than once before, shamming dead. A few short paces and she caught sight of the edge of the small round table, and, perched upon its edge, his head cocked knowingly on one side, and every feather quivering with delight, was Tip. Another pace, and she, too, quivered from

head to foot. It was only a quick, half-stifled gasp that she gave, but it was the nearest approach to the ordinary young lady's scream that Vi had ever been guilty of, for there, seated at the table, with his back turned towards her, was the Nipper himself, or—as perhaps would have been the ordinary, the very ordinary young lady's thought—the Nipper's ghost. But ghosts and such like had not come much in Vi's way, and after the first little gasp and amazed quiver, she thought of nothing but the delight of finding him back again so soon.

He was writing; she could see that, and softly she stole up behind him. Part of a note, scrawled in lead pencil, and commencing, "Dear old Vi," lay on the table, and she read the composition, as far as it had proceeded, over his shoulder.

"Dear old Vi," it ran, "don't be feeble, and get frightened at my turning up, but

come out at once. I'm all right, and want to see you awfully. You will find me in the summer-house with old Tip; and I'll bet, my news will just about astonish you, so," again scrawled on the Nipper, "don't be feeble, and——"

"You've said that before, rude boy," quietly interposed Vi, striving hard to keep her arms off him for a second. Not for more than a second was it possible, and then away flew the letter, over went the table, and exultingly cawed the capsized but irrepressible jackdaw. For some few seconds, that jubilant bird monopolized all the noise, and might have continued his solo much longer, had not either the exuberance of his spirits, or a wish to be reinstated upon his "game" leg, prompted him to pick an insinuating peck at the nearest unbreeched human leg. The peccant action had the desired effect.

"Poor old Tip," gasped Vi, starting

back quickly from her brother, and righting the flapping bird and the table; “poor old fellow! And now let’s have the news that is to astonish me, Dicky. You look seedy, dear old boy.”

“I was precious seedy about a month ago,” replied the Nipper; “but if you’ll only give a fellow time, I’ll spin you the whole yarn.”

Of course Vi would give him time. Was not she the most patient, the least hasty person extant? Certainly she was. Had not she said it?

“Dig out!” she cried, joining Tip upon the ricketty table. It *was* so like old times; “dig out, old stick!” and the antique *bâton* excavated.

“But where are they all? Where is the—the poor old governor?” she demanded, eagerly, when the whole yarn had been spun, and Tip sat deserted upon his ricketty table.

Vi had laughed, and Vi had cried, and Vi had asked as many questions as any other than Vi could have ever *thought* of during the story. Now she sat upon the ant-eaten bench, close beside the Nipper; and, with the tears still in her eyes, the smiles alone upon her face, asked for nothing better than permission to rush off, without a moment's delay, to the "poor old governor." She could not believe; it seemed impossible he would not recognise her.

"Why haven't you brought them? Where are they?" she repeated, in the patient, calm tones, which, as she had said, were so peculiarly hers.

"Don't make such a blooming row," politely commanded the Nipper. "They are at Southampton, in lodgings, and Clarke is with them."

"Jolly old cock, that chaplain of yours!" remarked Vi.

The influence of the old summer house was upon her yet—for slang.

“He is *so*,” agreed the Nipper. “He’s as good a sort as a proper country parson; lots of naval chaplains are. He and the commodore arranged everything for us at the Cape, and he has proposed a plan of action which—Now, if you’ll kindly allow me to explain,” broke off Dicky, with dignity, nipping a budding series of feminine questions and exclamations. Vi subsided with an injured air, but, nevertheless, regarded the Nipper admiringly. Few people could silence Vi. Did she not know it?

“What Clarke proposes is this,” resumed the Nipper, whilst Vi listened meekly. “The mater—you’ll like her awfully, Vi—is, of course, wild to see Mary, and is convinced that she is her lost child, and I’m blowed if I know

who else she can be. Armstrong and that fellow Lawrence must have been mistaken about the initials, for Mary was found lashed to a grating, just as Mrs. Ormby — the mater — says about *her* kid. By-the-bye, is Armstrong staying here?"

Vi was not so ready with her remarks now, but Dicky was soon in possession of the facts.

"You ought to have kicked him out long before; the mean beast, taking advantage of a couple of girls." And the Nipper swore a gun-room oath of enormous calibre, whilst an unit of the "couple of girls" smiled encouragement.

"I shouldn't wonder after that," he continued, "if the whole thing about Mary wasn't a plant. But, as I was saying, the mater is wild to see her—and you, too, for the matter of that; so Clarke thinks

you had both better come down to Southampton with me."

"I'm afraid it's too late, isn't it?" asked Vi, disconsolately.

"Oh, I don't mean to-day. As the uncle is so seedy, it would never do to tell him such startling news just yet. When will the *Tigris* arrive at Portsmouth?"

"The day after to-morrow, most likely," replied Vi.

"Well, that will fit in capitally. Mr. Monkton will be dead on for meeting Cecil, and you and Mary must get him to take you down for the day; then I can meet you at Portsmouth, and take you on to Southampton without the uncle having to be told anything yet. Now, old chap, I must clear out; I have to catch the 6.45 to London Bridge, and must sneak round by the new plantation and over West Hill to avoid being spotted."

“Surely you might sleep here,” said Vi. “None of the servants would tell the uncle.”

“Wouldn’t trust the beggars; bound to let on,” briefly responded the Nipper. “Besides, I must report myself to the Medical Director-General early to-morrow, and try to knock some sick leave out of him.”

“Good-bye, then, dear old fellow; I don’t half like letting you go so soon.”

“It’s not for long, you know. Mind you drop me a line to say the train you will come to Portsmouth by.” And with a big kiss for Vi, and a scratch on the poll for Tip, Dicky departed over the wall at the back of the summer house; and that evening, Vi—waiting patiently until her uncle had fallen asleep—told Mary all that had happened.

* * *

How heavily the hours dragged along

all through the next day; how many unanswered questions and wild surmises were hazarded, whenever Mary and Vi found themselves within whispering distance. It passed at last; and, after breakfast, on the following morning, Mr. Monkton drove over for them to start on the day's excursion to Portsmouth, where they were timed to arrive at eleven o'clock.

The two girls soon gave Mr. Monkton as clear a notion, as two girls could be expected to give, of passing events; and had the satisfaction of seeing that their news astonished, even that particularly casual gentleman.

Arrived at Portsmouth station, they found not only the Nipper, but Cecil Monkton and Daintree, waiting to receive them, the *Tigris* having come into harbour at daylight that morning.

“Come along, come along,” cried Dicky,

after allowing the girls barely time to say, “How d’ye do?” “We must hurry up; Cecil’s got one of the trooper’s boats to take us across to Gossy, and we shan’t reach Southampton till 2.30. Two hours there, and you will have to be travelling home again.”

“Well, we can all go as far as the Gosport station with you,” said Mr. Monkton; and Cecil quite agreed with his father. Dicky had not forgotten to growl to his friend about Armstrong’s behaviour to Vi and Mary, and it had been the most welcome growl he had heard for many a day.

The *Tigris*’ cutter soon put them over the water, and there was still time to walk quietly up to the station.

Dicky was in great form, acquainting Mr. Monkton with his numerous arrangements, and his opinions on things in general.

“Have you heard of my—my *disengagement*, Cecil?”

Thus, said Vi, stealing a look at Monkton as they tramped over the Gosport shingle. Would he be pleased and show it, she wondered?

Cecil looked grave; far more grave than he *felt*, notwithstanding that this childish, saucy young person, had—through her engagements—decided him to accept his appointment to the *Tigris*, and so to get away from England for a time. But he could look grave, and speak gravely. “Yes, I have heard,” he said. “Was it not almost as complete a ‘happy thought’ as the engagement itself?”

Vi did not answer, and did not steal another look just then. She walked along demurely, with downcast eyes, and Cecil was on the point of speaking to her again, with all the joy he really felt

at finding her free, when she turned abruptly to Daintree, and laughingly inquired whether he and Blanche had continued to approximate after leaving Malta. Mary had been rallying him on the same subject, considerably it seemed to his discomfort; if one could judge—as one *never could*—by the quantity of dismalness expressed in his tone as he slowly made answer: “It’s very hard on me. I told her distinctly that I didn’t want to get married; that I wasn’t a marrying man; and yet she humbugs me like this.”

“Then you *are* engaged!” cried Vi, delightedly.

“Not quite as bad as that,” murmured Daintree, in plaintive tones. “But she said that she’d speak to Mrs. Ottorose Smith. Goodness only knows why!”

“Why to sanction your engagement, of course,” laughed Vi. “Without knowing

it, you must have asked Blanche to marry you, and I do most devoutly hope that she makes you stick to it."

"Don't say that," implored Daintree. "She couldn't—*no one* could be so cruel, so heartless! But she's awfully clever, and I shouldn't be surprised to find at any moment that she'd married me without my knowing it. I ask you, could any man be more wretchedly situated?"

"Don't listen to his humbug," interposed Cecil. "Blanche has naturally gone off at once to see Mrs. Ottorose Smith, but that disgraceful deceiver never asked the poor girl to marry him, I know."

"Poor girl—I mean 'disgraceful deceiver' yourself;" retorted Daintree. "If marriage wasn't such a permanency, I'd give up misogamy and throw myself away, just to sell you all," he added, as they entered the railway station.

Cecil and Daintree were to remain at

Portsmouth for a week or two yet; but, before the train started, Mr. Monkton—who intended to spend the day with his son—arranged to meet the girls again at the Portsmouth station, on their return from Southampton, and to take them back to Westfield.

The brothers and sisters—for, as Vi said, though Mary had turned out to be Mrs. Ormby's daughter, she was still a kind of a sort of a half step sister to Dicky and herself—soon became silent after leaving Gosport, each thinking of the trying meeting before them.

At Southampton, Mr. Clarke was on the platform, his pleasant greeting quite confirming Vi in her previous conviction that he was a “jolly old cock.”

“We had better lose no time in getting to the cottage,” he said, turning to Mary. “Mrs. Ormby will be anxiously expecting us.”

“And the poor governor?” asked Vi, anxiously.

“You must not hope for *very* much,” replied Clarke, and then they hailed a growler. “We tried hard to make him understand something about your visit,” continued the chaplain, sadly, as they all drove off; “but just at present he remembers about no one but his brother—your uncle; nothing but his guitar. Even his strange idea, about doing away with children under four years of age, has been forgotten since he was taken away from his pups and kittens at the Cape.” Vi sighed, and very little more was said, until the cab stopped at a short distance from a small cottage, which stood well back from the main road.

To this cottage—far removed from the breath and racket of the large seaport town—Mrs. Ormby had taken her husband, and towards it, with beating hearts,

the two girls now walked. The one to be restored, she trusted, to a fond mother; the other to be, at best, barely recognised by an unremembered and sorely afflicted father.

Dicky reached the wicket and threw it open for them, and before it swung to again, Mary was in the arms of her mother. No need of questions! no room for doubts! Mother and daughter were satisfied. The child had become a young woman; the young mother's youth had fled during those fourteen years of separation; but it was only fourteen years, and they were satisfied.

How can one write of feelings such as theirs? How repeat their tender words? How describe their loving looks?

The others standing around could understand, could feel, as they silently watched the rapturous meeting. And for

us, the far-off ones, cannot we feel too ? We who have known a mother's welcoming kiss, have seen a mother's tears of joy, heard a mother's fervent thanksgiving prayer ! cannot we feel with the child enfolded once more in a mother's arms ? We who in the battle with death have helped the loved one who alone made our happiness—our life ; and who have watched our darling strike life's colours to mortality, and leave us with no flag to sail under ; nothing but our worn hull with its bare ensign staff to tell of our fight, our defeat ! Cannot we feel with the mother, as she strains her only child to her heart, saved and restored ?

They were very silent in that close embrace, and the child was the first to gently release herself and look towards Vi.

Only for a minute had Mrs. Ormby

forgotten her step-daughter, and now needed no reminder to turn at once and tenderly greet her ; Vi herself feeling strongly drawn towards this tender, loving wife of her poor father.

Then, this first meeting over, they walked on again towards the cottage, Mrs. Ormby and Mary a short distance ahead. They had approached to within twenty yards of the door when, suddenly, the sound of music made them pause ; then, guided by Mrs. Ormby, they moved noiselessly forward a few more steps, and found themselves in sight of the small sitting-room, and seated in it—close to the open window—Mr. Ormby ; the loved guitar upon his knees, his head thrown well back as preparing to sing, and nothing in his sad expression to tell of the wandering brain ; nothing in the closed eyelids to tell of the sightless orbs beneath.

To Vi—seeing him for the first time—it seemed that this grave, sad-looking man—the father of whom she had heard so much—could not *really* be mad; and, breathlessly, she waited for his voice.

Some of the old associations were wanting, something was missing in this new home of his, for the voice sounded more plaintive, the music was more solemn, than when Dicky had first listened to his unknown father's song, through the open window at the Cape of Good Hope ostrich farm. As then, the guitar, with its light, running accompaniment, appeared to be, of all instruments, the best suited to give additional sweetness to his tender love song; so now, its chords, struck but seldom, and even then scarcely to be distinguished from the voice of the singer, seemed fitted beyond all others to join in, and

add a yet deeper tone of sadness to his tones, as one of the most beautiful of our hymns broke from his lips, and reached the hushed listeners:—

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
 Lead Thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
 Lead Thou me on.

The voice dropped yet lower, and the next words were lost. Vi, leaving her brother's side, had stepped a little forward as the first notes of the hymn fell upon her ear; and now, trembling with eagerness, she drew still nearer the window, and stood ahead of them all, listening intently. Again, as Mr. Ormby commenced another verse in a louder, but inexpressibly mournful tone, the listeners could catch the words, and Vi fancied she could trace tears stealing from beneath the closed eyelids, and coursing slowly down her father's cheeks, as his

voice once more thrilled through her excited feelings :—

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Should'st lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on.

Again the voice sunk low, and Vi, turning about, fell back softly to her brother's side. “Dicky, old fellow,” she whispered, grasping his arm nervously, “I can't bear it. He *must* understand what he is saying; he must feel it all. Eh? Don't you think so, Dicky? *Don't* you?”

The Nipper's voice trembled as he shook his head hopelessly: “Steady, little woman,” he whispered back; “*steady*. He means—*nothing*; poor old governor!”

Once more Vi watched eagerly the grave, sad face; listened intently to the touching tones which seemed to express such strong emotion, and once more the words sounded clear and distinct:—

And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

Amen.

The hymn was over ; the last chord struck ; and the singer—the sad look still upon his face—sat perfectly still and silent.

“ Dicky, he *must* know ! *Father ! Dear* old father ! You know your little Vi, *don’t* you ? ” The affectionate, impetuous little daughter was at the low, open window, was through it, and upon her knees before her father’s chair. “ Not lost, dear old governor,” she passionately cried, gazing up at the sightless eyes, unclosed since his song was finished. “ *Not lost* any longer, you know, dear,” she repeated tenderly, whilst the others, silently, but almost without hope, awaited the issue.

Gradually the sad expression died out of the father’s face, and Vi—watching

eagerly—shuddered to note the vacant look which crept forward in its stead, only to be chased away by his startled, bewildered air as he moved from his seat, and the guitar fell unheeded to the ground.

“Take me away; take me away,” he murmured, helplessly waving his arms before him; in his fright and agitation losing all idea of his whereabouts. Mrs. Ormby was quickly at his side, and when she had steadied him on her arm, and moved a step or two forward, he grew calmer.

“Mrs. Ormby,” whispered Vi—only now rising from where she had knelt beside her father’s chair—and impetuously clutching at her stepmother’s dress, “Mrs. Ormby! *mother!* *you* speak; he will listen to you, his wife.”

In her soft, soothing tones, Mrs. Ormby made the attempt. “Richard,” she said,

pausing with him as they crossed the room; "you remember Vi, don't you? We brought you your lost son the other day, and now we have found your lost daughter. You remember your lost daughter, Richard?"

Would he remember? An expression of interest, almost of animation passed over his features.

"Yes, I remember," he said, speaking as though he repeated a lesson; "I remember my only daughter; drowned on her fourth birthday. But I don't -- like," he added, with a shudder, the frightened look stealing forward again; "I don't like—it *hurts* me to hear her voice now that she's drowned."

"But it's me, father! your other daughter. Don't you remember your other daughter?" cried Vi, gazing anxiously in his face, but afraid to startle him again by her touch.

“Drowned on her fourth birthday ; but her voice—hurts me,” repeated Mr. Ormby, nervously dragging his wife forward. “Take me away, woman, take me away,” he muttered on, and they reached the door.

“But father ! Oh, heavens ! my father ! Only say you will *try* ! you will, won’t you ? You must remember Vi ; your *little Vi* !”

His daughter was at his side again, appealing—entreating ; and, seemingly, struck by the anguish of her voice, he stopped and turned towards her curiously, and she could almost fancy—as Barnaby had, at the Cape—that the blind eyes grew expressive. “I thought it was *her* voice,” he mused aloud ; “but that cannot be. Who is this one ?”

“He knows ! He understands !” cried Vi, so passionately, so triumphantly, that the others—awaiting with anxiety the

effect of her eager appeal—felt a thrill of hope as she spoke. “Father!” she continued through her tears, “Father; who should it be? Who *can* it be, dear, but your daughter Vi?”

Would he remember? He still turned inquiringly towards her and suffered her to hold his arm, to cling closely to him; but he made no attempt to speak. The interest was fast fading out of his face, and Vi forced herself to speak again, with quivering lips and broken voice.

“Try to remember, just for a moment, dear.” she urged piteously, “that shipwreck ——” With a shudder he turned away; but Vi only grasped his arm the tighter, and spoke on. “Well, we won’t talk about that, dear; but I’m sure, if you will only try, you can remember Barbadoes and Dicky, and me and uncle —your brother John, you know, dear.” With a choking sob she ceased, for her

father had thrust her from him, and with a cry of pain, almost of horror, had groped his way wildly through the door, his wife following quickly and closing it behind her, and Vi—with Dicky at her side—covered her face and wept unrestrainedly.

"Never mind, little woman," said the Nipper, after a few moments: and Mary joined her sister and stole her arm around her. "Never mind, old Vi," said the Nipper again, with a desperate attempt at cheeriness: "It will all come right, old fellow. Poor old governor! He always tops his boom when he hears his brother's tally."

"I am such a feeble mulf," murmured Vi, sorrowfully, but Dicky withheld his assent. "No, no. How could you tell?" said he. "The Uncle's number was flying before you thought about it."

"That's all very well, but I am," insisted

Vi, drying her eyes, and speaking with great self-reproach; “I’m a great *ass* and—I know it,” she concluded, with a small blush, as she caught a glimpse of the chaplain’s amused and slightly astonished face.

“Well, as you *are* so pressing,” laughed the Nipper, happy at having succeeded in checking the flood; “as you *insist* upon it, you must e’en be an *ass*, but nothing can persuade me that you are a *great* one.”

“I do not think that you need blame yourself at all,” said the chaplain, kindly, but Miss obstinate Vi shook her head, refusing to abate one jot or tittle of her previous statement regarding her peculiar transmigratory qualities. She was regaining her spirits, however. Until this actual meeting with her father, she had not fully realized the extent of his affliction; now she could feel how useless her

repeated appeals had been, and how futile a renewal of them would be at present.

Mrs. Ormby soon returned, and persuaded them all to have tea before their journey back. Dicky's determined efforts made them all fairly cheerful, but Mrs. Ormby and Mary grew very silent, as the time for them to separate drew near. This first meeting had been so short and so disturbed, it seemed hard to part again at once. But they had the consolation of knowing that this time it would not be for long; for, in a few days, Mary was to guide her mother and Mr. Clarke to Lawrence's old lodgings in St. Martin's Lane, to learn if he was still living there, and, if possible, what were really the initials on those baby clothes. No one doubted that they were M.D. not M.O as he had sworn—Dixon having been the name of Mrs. Ormby's first husband,

Mary's father—but Clarke, and indeed all of them, decided that it would be best to hear the truth from the man's own lips.

The time to start came round all too quickly. Poor Mr. Ormby had recovered his guitar, and had wandered out into the garden with it, so they said their good-byes quietly in the house, then passed silently out of the door and round, at some little distance behind his chair, to the gate where their cab was waiting.

Vi looked wistfully at him as she moved noiselessly by, not to disturb him; and she and Dicky stopped for a moment at the gate, and listened to the sad voice, which even now made her almost believe "*he must understand; he must feel.*" And the words of the grand hymn which has stirred so many hearts, and had last taken the father's wandering fancy,

reached his unknown children's ears once more :—

And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

And the words had no meaning for him. The music ceased. Vi remembered again; and with a low sigh suffered Dicky to hurry her on—homeward bound.



CHAPTER VI.

WHO or three days passed, and the Vicar of Westfield remained a prisoner to his bed; a severe cold had again seized him, and he seemed to have no strength wherewith to shake it off. The village doctor daily drove his dog-cart up the steep incline by the Lime Walk, and yesterday, seated by his side—Stubbs sulking with folded arms upon the back seat—was a celebrated brother medico of Tunbridge Wells renown. To this great man Vi had opened her heart. Should her uncle be told that his brother Richard was found, and mad? that the nephew whom he so much longed to see again

was in England? or had they better keep the news from him until he got better? Until he got better! Poor little Vi!

The great man had not hastily committed himself; he had seen his patient, and then told Vi that she need not wait; that the news had better be told at once. Vi had told; and had been surprised to find how quietly the old vicar heard her story; then she had telegraphed to Dicky to come home, and the great doctor, as he cheerfully bade her good-bye, had promised to drive over again in a week's time, if he heard nothing to the contrary. *Still* Vi had not understood what it was he expected to hear; she had not thought of death; and the stolid Stubbs' long hat, which had entered upon the financial year on top of a much smaller headed youth, flew lightly into Stubbs' lap, as even

Stubbs started on hearing the healer of Wells remark :—

“I give the poor old man six days at the outside.”

Dicky had arrived yesterday morning, and, after a talk with the village doctor, had broken the bad news to Vi. The vicar himself needed no telling. And with Dicky at his bedside again ; with his poor brother Richard’s wife to look after Vi when he was gone, the old man was ready for his long journey. One trouble alone remained, and that was in truth a great one. Nothing could induce his brother to come near him ; the old dread—so unaccountable to all save the two brothers —was still upon the poor wandering mind.

“I had hoped that that might have been forgotten with the rest,” the vicar had murmured sadly, when they told him of their vain efforts. “But His will be done,” he had added humbly ; “I

had no right to make myself a judge over my brother."

And until the last day, which was so soon to come, he did not again mention his brother's name aloud.

But it is with Mrs. Ormby and Mary that we have to concern ourselves to-day. Early this morning, whilst Vi and Dicky were slowly passing the Lime Walk, and talking in hushed tones of the uncle, and the poor old governor, the mother and daughter had been met by Mr. Clarke at the Charing Cross railway station, and now—accompanied by him—they are passing along the streets through which we followed Mr. Jack Armstrong on a Sunday forenoon, not very long gone by.

It is not Sunday to-day, and the noise—for that reason—is somewhat less. The shops are open on the ordinary "swop," or else the cash system; the street hawkers—such at least as are able to tear them-

selves away from the pleasures of the tempting palace, and its “two of gin”—are comparatively silent, and appear to be relegated to the mud and cart wheels; so passers by have a chance of actually doing so, and upon the pavement.

“I. Meshack, bird fancier, etc,” lolls out of the same upper window, apparently in the same shirt sleeves as when last we rang the bell of No. 120; but the aviary, etc., is open to day, and Madame Meshack, quitting her—literally—“birds with *painted* plumage gay,” darts from behind the counter as the two ladies—*real* ladies; and a parson—not the vicar, that would be too much to expect at the S.W. end; and not the curate, he always came through the shop—arrive at the side door.

She is bulky though, nought of the viewless echo about this nymph of the woods, or at all events, the winged denizens

thereof; and I. Meshack, B.F.—bird fancier not the other thing—has time to don the alpaca coat, and gorgeous smoking cap of his tribe, and yet be the “first to *unbar* the door, oh!”—as the old song has *not* it.

Turning the key of the door leading from the shop upon Mrs. M., as a check to the promptings of nymph-like curiosity, he—lowly bowing—admitted the visitors.

“Ah! Meess Mary!” he cried, directly he caught sight of her.

“Send I neffer sin, if I haff not pray the blessed week past, to see your sweet yong face again. Vat choys! vat delights, off your tear atoopsed parents ven ‘e seess you—yess, oh, yess, vat choys!—But I preessume my Laty,” he added, with a yet lower cringe, “the Laty and Shentle-manss vass valk in alsso, ant meke for themselvess a home at the poor Chew’s; iss it not sso?” he asked, addressing him-

self to Mary, as the three visitors remained standing on the door step.

“Then Mr. Lawrence *is* here!” said Mary, inquiringly.

Yes, he certainly *had* been there, admitted the poor, but honest Jew. But would not they come in, and make themselves at home? The frank Hebrew was afraid he had been unwary, for instead of Mary knowing that Lawrence was there—as he had supposed; it was evident from her inquiry, that she had been given the slip by Lawrence, that philanthropic guardian of her youth. It might prove serious, the mistake of that descendant of Abraham, and inwardly cursing his stupidity, he hastened to place himself upon a somewhat broader footing.

“Only, s’elp me now,” he said, in deep distress; “send I may neffer sin, if I ton’t think ’e vass valk out tvite von hour beyont. Take me oath, I think so now;

but iff the Laty, and —. But I pree-
ssume," he broke off hastily, seeing that
they were determined not to come in,
unless they could make sure of seeing
Lawrence ; " mine Gott off Shem and
Heber, how I vass preessume! I now
enkivre off your—Moses! vat do I say?
—I now *see iff* your friend iss in." And
this most choice, chosen person, shuffled
off.

He soon returned to say that Mr. Lawrence was in, and would see them ; and then telling Mary that she would find her ex-adopted parent in his old room, he disappeared into the shop. Presumably, even I. Meshack felt ashamed to take them upstairs himself, and show them the man who, he *thought*, had gone out for a walk.

Without giving him time to recover his native cheek, and only too glad to escape him, Mary led the way to the old sitting

room. No one was there; it looked as if no one had been there for some time; but a voice called from the next door that, if she wasn't too cursedly modest, she had better come in there; and, with a slight shudder, she went with the others.

She entered first, and with a startled cry stopped close inside the door; for Lawrence, a very shadow of his former self, but with a sneaking smile upon his haggard face, lay propped up on the bed; and, seated on a chair at the bed side, her head resting with his upon the pillows, was a young girl,—a Jewess evidently—and of the Meshack family; indeed it was the eldest *daughter* of our illustrious bird fanciers.

The girl looked up saucily at Mary, but made no attempt to move. Lawrence, too, remained motionless at first, but in another moment his taunting smile fled, and

a look almost of shame succeeded, as Mrs. Ormby, following quickly on her daughter, entered the room.

One glance at the ghastly face on the bed—a glance which never took in the girlish wanton one lying beyond it—and with an irrepressible cry of surprise, and anguish, Mrs. Ormby grasped her daughter's arm.

“*You here?*” she cried, in horror-stricken tones; pointing her trembling hand at Lawrence. “*You here?*” she repeated; her face growing worn and ghastly as that other one. “But it is Mr. *Lawrence* that we wish to see,” she continued, eagerly, as a hope that there might be some mistake suddenly seized her.

The haggard face on the bed broke again into its scoffing smile, and Mrs. Ormby, feeling sick with horror, fell mechanically into the chair to which Mary

—dreading she scarcely knew what—had tenderly led her.

The Jewess now raised her head from the pillow, and glared defiantly at the visitors, then threw an arm around Lawrence's neck and said, coaxingly, "You talk to 'em, Jim. What does the old girl mean with her tantrums in our room? Eh, Jim, dear?"

Lawrence shook her off sulkily, and turned to answer Mrs. Ormby. "Yes, it's *me*," said he, grimly watching her pale face. "Are you going to faint for joy," he continued, "at finding me alive, and—jolly?"

Mrs. Ormby made a great effort, and recovered herself a little. She knew that this man would be merciless if he felt that he had power. For Mary's sake, even more than for her own, she nerved herself to answer composedly.

"Do I look as though I should faint?

Do I look joyful?" she asked. "But," she continued, wonderingly, whilst Mary sat still, mute and trembling, "I saw your name in the papers amongst the list of killed in that railway accident. Some one sent the paper out to Barbadoes to me."

"Yes; I recovered, though. I lost a leg by their cursed carelessness, and didn't think it worth while to correct the error. Perhaps I thought it might save bother, you know."

Mrs. Ormby shivered. "But suppose," she said, "suppose I had married again? It was not unlikely that I might do so."

"Ah! I didn't go into that," coolly replied Lawrence; or, to give him his right name—the name under which, years ago, he had wooed and won the poor governess—Dixon.

"I was all right, my dear," he added, with a harsh laugh; "I didn't think of

marrying again ; it wasn't necessary." And leering knowingly, he turned towards the girl at his side, who, with a triumphant look at Mrs. Ormby, replaced her arm around his neck, and laughingly rewarded him with a sip from a spirit flask she drew from her bosom.

" Well," sneered Dixon, smacking his lips and glancing at Mrs. Ormby, " I'm glad we've had no heroics. Who is the black-coated party? By Gad, I see how it is ; he's the new husband, eh ? "

Clarke remained perfectly silent, and touched Mary warningly, as she moved and seemed about to speak.

" Plymouth Brother, your reverence ?" continued the sneering voice. But though Clarke could not refrain from a slight shudder, as the name expressing—to his mind—the very abomination of dissension, was coupled with his title. He said nothing, and Mrs. Ormby—for we may still

let her and Mary remain Ormbys in name—roused herself once more.

“What is the use of bitterness?” she said, speaking in her usual gentle tone, and with a look of something akin to pity on her face, as she turned to the utter wreck of the man whom she had married, and from whom she had separated so long, long ago. “What can be the use?” she repeated wearily. But Mary’s hand pressed tenderly upon hers, reminding her of what, in her misery, she had almost forgotten; and she spoke on with more eagerness. “There is but one thing for us to learn, and we will trouble you no more.”

“The devil you won’t! And what may that be, my most accommodating of wives? Who may *we* be?” asked Dixon. And the pretty, flaunting girl at his side joined shrilly in his scornful laugh, as she twined her arms more closely round him.

“ *We!*” echoed Mrs. Ormby. “ But I forget,” she added, pressing her hand to her forehead and looking anxiously at the haggard face on the pillows. “ Of course you must be told. *We* means my daughter, Mary, and myself.”

“ What! your daughter; what daughter?” he cried, quickly. “ Oh, I see,” he continued. “ By Gad, my lady wife, you lost no time in getting tied up again. Eh, my reverend brother?”

“ That’s your style, old man; give it into them,” laughed the girl.

“ I have had but one child,” continued Mrs. Ormby, quietly, “ and this is the one—yours and mine.”

“ Mine! Heaven and hell! What do you say? *Mine!* Let go, you little soft imp!” And flinging off the round arms that embraced him, Dixon sat up gaunt and meagre, staring at Mary. *She*—his daughter—moved a step towards

him, but he waved her back, and pushed farther away the girl now standing close to the bed side.

“Don’t come near me,” he called, hoarsely, to Mary. “You, my daughter! Heavens above! And *I*—I would have made you like *this*.” And he glanced contemptuously at the Jewess, who with glowing cheeks and clenched hands was watching him narrowly.

Mrs. Ormby approached the bed. She could not help fearing this man, who had made her early married life wretched, and whose wilful silence concerning his reported death bade fair to embitter the remainder of her existence; but she knew her duty, this gentle, motherly woman, and it might be possible to reclaim him, even at the eleventh hour.

“Shall I tell you of our daughter?” she asked. And in the silence which followed she commenced telling him of

the child's birth abroad after their separation; of the shipwreck and disastrous panic; and finally of the recent happy re-union.

Without uttering a word, Dixon had listened. Had listened, and heard that the baby girl, picked up by the small coasting vessel, in which he was serving at that time as steward, the girl whom he had promised to take care of in England, finding out all about her parents, etc., but whom he had quietly kept to make useful to himself—providing him with money in any way he might consider suitable—was really his daughter. And now, in the first shock of his great surprise and weakness, he felt ashamed at the thought of all he made her suffer; more ashamed still, as he thought of the life which he would not have scrupled to compel her to lead, had not his pecuniary arrangements with Armstrong taken her

out of his clutches. And this girl was his *daughter*! Disturbed and thoughtful, he gazed from one to the other; whilst wife and daughter pondered over what they could say to increase the good effects already produced.

Here was a chance of reclamation! A hope!—dear to every tender woman's heart—that they might by their womanly influence reclaim this erring man.

Mrs. Ormby was the first to break the silence.

“Do you think you can remember the initials?” she asked. She wished to hear them from his own lips, although there was no doubt in her mind. Dixon pointed to a cupboard near, and gave Mary the key. “I *said* I had lost them,” he muttered, as Mary drew from an inside drawer several of her own baby clothes. Yes, there were the expected initials—M. D.—upon all of them.

“Did you never think what they might stand for?” said Mrs. Ormby.

“Never, by Heaven! I never even knew that you had had a child,” answered Dixon—and never cared, he might have added.

Again a long silence was broken by Mrs. Ormby.

“Are you comfortable here?” she asked, and then her eye caught the motionless figure of the Jewess, and her pale face coloured painfully.

“Comfortable!” echoed Dixon, all unconscious of her feelings; “as comfortable as I am ever likely to be,” he murmured.

“No, no; don’t say that,” said Mrs. Ormby, all her womanly pity awakened by his wretchedness. “You need not remain here,” she continued, unheeding the malignant look of the creature at his side; “Mary and I could get you nice quiet

lodgings, away from this—away from here. Could we not, Mary?"

"Of course we would, mother dear," replied Mary.

"He will come with us," thought mother and daughter, watching an eager expression of surprise and gladness pass over his face.

"If I had known before," thought he, "I might have done worse. Perhaps even now——"

"Jim!" whispered the girl in his ear; "Jim!" But he never noticed.

"Perhaps even *now!*!" he thought again. "No, no. It's not good enough," he muttered on to himself; "I can't last long; what's the use of changing," and he looked away from the pleaders.

"You will let us arrange it, then?" said Mrs. Ormby, earnestly; she could almost guess his wavering thoughts. "Mary and I will come back directly we

have taken lodgings, and then we will soon nurse you into good health."

"We will try hard," added Mary.

Not for many a long year had good and evil struggled for the mastery of the reprobate, and now it was too late. He knew that his days, his hours were numbered, and as soon as the first surprise, the succeeding shame had passed away, evil remained, as before, in complete possession.

"Jim," whispered the triumphant master's soft, seductive representative; "Jim, dear!" and he turned away from wife, away from daughter.

"I almost thought they'd make a fool of you, Jim dear." And he yielded himself without a word to the wanton caress.

With a look, in which pity, disappointment, disgust were all mingled, Mrs. Ormby glanced towards the chap-

lain. “What can we do?” she murmured, sadly; “is there *nothing* to be done?”

“I am afraid, *nothing*,” he answered, then looked at the almost hidden figure on the bed. “Mr. Dixon!” he said, earnestly, “you cannot mean us to think that you prefer to remain here? Surely you will decide otherwise. If, as you say, you have not many days to live, beware how you spend them.”

“A short life and a merry one,” laughed the girl; “that’s our style, isn’t it, Jim, dear?” And the man said never a word.

“*Silence, woman!*” said Clarke, sternly; whilst, at his sign, Mrs. Ormby and Mary moved slowly towards the door.

“Think of your wife!” he continued, appealingly.

“Ah, ha!” laughed the girl; “what’s he want with a wife? She’s got her

new man, and he's got *me*; haven't you, Jim?"

And this time he moved a little nearer her, as she leant over him.

"Be silent, woman!" repeated the chaplain, but the Jewess only laughed derisively.

"Mr. Dixon," he continued, "again, I appeal to you alone. Do not stay in this place; come away with your wife and the daughter so wonderfully restored to you."

"Ah, ha!" laughed the girl once more; and a soft colour stole over her cheek for a moment. Could she?—was it *possible* that she *loved* this man? The man to whom her purity and innocence had been sold? She was only a child, after all, and surely very pitiable, and now the man's harsh tones joined in the laugh.

There was no hope then; nothing more

to be done for the present; and the three visitors, looking for the last time, for so it proved to be, upon Jim Lawrence or Dixon, opened the door and passed quickly out.

So quickly indeed did Mrs. Ormby open the door, when the last harsh laugh sounded, that a full view of Mr. I. Meshack's back making for an opposite door, was presented to them, and, under the circumstances, I. Meshack evidently thought it as well to stop and face them boldly. This, at any rate, *he did*; wearing a malicious expression much at variance with his usual cringing servility. He had heard quite enough of the latter part of the interview, to know that the game was in his own or rather his *daughter's* hands, and that these Gentiles, his enemies, might be scoffed at with impunity.

“And how vass our poor Chrisstian

frient and love't relations?" he inquired with a grin, during which Clarke carefully put him against the wall that the ladies might pass. "Plessant cirl, mine daughters! Eh, Meess Mary?" he continued, following poor Mary closely along the passage; "*she'ss* not too crand to make leetle moneys for her poor old parents."

The ladies hurried on, but Clarke paused for a minute at the top of the stairs. "Look you, my friend," said he, "I am not of your religion, but I am an old man—older than you are, *much*—and I appeal to you to save that wretched young girl. It is a shame to you, as a man—let alone, an old one, and her father—to thrive on her ruin."

The Jew stood still, and regarded him with a look of bland surprise.

"I am not a rich man," resumed the

chaplain, “but if it is only a question of money—”

“*Precisely*,” murmured the Jew, “you may swear to that, most certainly—*moneys*.”

“Then if I were to offer to—”

“No, no, Mr. Parsons,” sneered the Jew, “not this time, you ton’t. Our friend up beyont payss better than a parsons could. But,” he continued, returning to the old servile tone, “I ton’t wonter at your likings ’er, me tear; she’ss a fine cirl; a telicious cirl, ant,” added he, looking cautiously around, and not noticing the look of speechless indignation with which Clarke was regarding him, “ant if, between ourselves, we could agree on the same terms, why, after our Chrisstian frient is ‘called away’—Eh?”

Clarke’s messmates, since he joined H.M. Navy, always said that it was impossible to “get a rise out of the

bishop." But there was a limit even to the bishop's endurance, and "I. Meshack, bird fancier, etc.," discovered it just one second too late. The *next*, he measured his full extent and lay motionless upon the floor, whilst the chaplain strode hastily over him and down the stairs ; the blood coursing as quickly through his veins as in the days when he played "forward" at "John's."

His flushed face and excited look, when he rejoined Mrs. Ormby and her daughter, did not altogether escape notice, but whatever they thought, whatever they may have *heard*, they said nothing, neither did the chaplain volunteer any information.

At the shop door they were waylaid by Mrs. Meshack, who remarked that it was "a beautiful day," and supposed that they must have had "business of great importance with Meshack," and, finally —finding that her remarks and supposi-

tions received no reply—expressed a desire to “lay a sixpence that they hadn’t come for no good.”

As neither of her hearers seemed to care particularly, either to listen to her cackling or know whether she purposed laying one sixpence or twins of that or any other coin of the realm, the bulbous nymph retired in lusty dudgeon behind her counter, and only recovered her spirits on the arrival of her husband, with a black eye and splitting headache, to “swear by the Gott of Heber,” and to add a hope that he “might neffer sin,” if he didn’t take out a summons against the parson that very day. We may conclude that if his hope was realized he never sinned again, for the parson remained at large.

A couple of days afterwards Mrs. Ormby presented herself at the side door, but Dixon would not see her, and she had to leave with the comfortable assurance—

delivered from an upper window by L. Meshack in dirty person—that Rebekah would look after him—body and soul.

Once more she went, and this time was granted admittance. The misery of watching at an unrepentant death bed had been spared her ; the last bond of her early life was severed.



CHAPTER VII.

AND in these last few days, the aged vicar of Westfield has quickly neared the goal. Even now, as Vi and Dicky take their morning walk—short and sober lately—between their loved old lime trees, and Mrs. Ormby and Mary watch, during their absence, by the vicar's bedside; even now! the end, on this side the river, approaches; miserable to the watchers, but felt and welcomed by the traveller, the change comes!

Very quiet is the Vicarage, very still the glebe land surrounding it; so still that Vi and Dicky can catch the sound of wheels, as the village doctor stops his trap outside

the big gates, and walks with his air of professional cheerfulness up the drive ; so still, that Vi hears another sound—at least as expected, possibly yet more welcome—as Cecil Monkton pulls up his horse, and, throwing the reins to the stolid Stubbs, hurries—as is *his* profession's way—after the doctor.

“ And how is our patient to-day ? ” inquired the latter, in low, but cheery, well-nigh brisk tones—low, as evincing a friendly regard for his hearers ; cheery, well-nigh brisk, as showing his readiness to be brought without delay face-to-face with the invalid, and his conviction that the result could not fail to be satisfactory.

His answer came unexpectedly from Mary, who now beckoned eagerly from the front door ; and, silently answering her summons, they felt that the change had come.

“He has asked for you both,” Mary whispered to Vi and Dicky. And they all moved quickly towards Mr. Ormby’s room.

The old vicar was seated in his arm-chair, his face showing few of the usual signs of mortal sickness ; and only when he feebly tried to move on his cushions could one note the utter exhaustion which had crept, nearly unopposed, over the worn frame ; slowly and relentlessly undermining each outwork, and seizing upon each outpost in succession, until now, all obstacles overcome, it blew its welcome summons beneath the walls of the citadel itself—which is the life thereof.

Mrs. Ormby was at his side, but drew back softly to make room for Vi and Dicky ; and the doctor, turning quietly away, fell back also.

What other sign was needed to foretell a speedy surrender ?

Shall we raise the curtain on such a scene?—striving to make our weak words describe the last actions, express the last thoughts of a man whose long life had been nearly blameless, whose end was surely to be—peace?

Better, I think, better always in such a case, to stand aside, and not encroach upon ground so sacred; but we may not absent ourselves altogether.

The prayers of the old vicar, as Vi and Dicky knelt on either side of him, are not for our ears; but when they cease with a blessing—which sounds indeed afar off to the sorrowing children—we may draw near with the others, and catch something of the whisper of his last wishes.

His mind seemed clearer, his low voice was more distinct than at any time since the commencement of his illness.

“ You will remember, my dear? ” were his first words, when the others stood close

around him. And Mrs. Ormby knew well what he would have her bear in mind, and pressed his hand silently—Dicky and Vi should find in her a mother.

For a few minutes the vicar remained thoughtful. Then a smile, which was but a parting of the wan lips, a new light in the way-worn eyes, but which told of contentment, expectation, beyond the power of words to express, caused each anxious heart to leap and throb, and, with a low, quick sob, Vi grasped his arm as though to stay the fleeting life.

Not yet too late! Not yet did Death enforce his victory. And, awakened to other thoughts, the vicar held fast the hand that had recalled him.

A look! and Cecil was alongside his old tutor and friend; and bending low, until his head was nearly on a level with Vi's, he listened eagerly. If it only might prove to be as he hoped!

But it was to Dicky that the vicar spoke next.

“ I had almost forgotten,” he said ; “ I had almost forgotten what you wanted me to say yesterday, my boy. That would never do, would it ? ” And he smiled anew ; whilst Dicky looked confused, and glanced across the chair at Vi and Cecil. He had not meant his name to appear ; “ they mightn’t like his shoving his oar in, you know.”

“ Dicky tells me,” continued the vicar, speaking quickly as his waning strength would permit, for fear that both time and strength might fail him ere his task was ended, “ tells me news. Cecil ; news that the old man and the boy should have guessed long ago, even though the little girl was blind.”

The small hand pressed between both of his moved quickly, but as quickly became still again, forbearing to struggle in such a clasp, whilst the colour rushed

to the little face which turned reproachfully towards Dicky; away from the bearded, sunburnt one bending so near it.

That sunburnt face was raised proudly as Cecil Monkton spoke: “*I* have been blind, sir,” he said, with great self-conviction, “the most blind of all! blind to my own feelings! But I understand them now. I believe, too, that I understand what you would say; and if Vi will only let me——”

“Oh! not *now*, Cecil! Please, not *now!*” wailed Vi; and Cecil understood, and was silent.

“Dicky was right, then,” said the vicar; and both men glanced gratefully at the blushing Nipper.

“It must be soon, Vi,” whispered the old man, as she stooped and kissed his forehead; “the sooner the better.”

“Perhaps he won’t be in such a hurry,

darling," she whispered back, and smiling ever so little through her tears, she turned shyly towards Cecil, who—exercising the greatest self-control—just abstained from hugging her on the spot.

In silence once more, they remained grouped around. The vicar's thoughts were again wandering far away, and a confused jumble of names alone reached them. But presently one was singled out from all the rest, and the words which followed it, though in broken sentences, sounded clear and distinct.

“Richard! *Richard!*” was the sorrowfully murmured name, showing that his thoughts were with his poor brother; and then, “How could he? How could he? I saw him catch her up—his favourite child—and rush with her to the boat, crying, ‘She’s sinking! She’s sinking!’ Great heavens! what misery that panic-stricken cry has caused! I saw him go,

I say, and I called him 'Coward.' I judged him, and now he fears me; *me*, his dying brother."

In hushed surprise the watchers had heard the short sentences which told so much of the past. This then was the hitherto unexplained cause of Richard Ormby's dread of his brother; a dread so great that—in spite of the forgetfulness, the disease of his wandering brain—he was conscious of it still.

The panic, so dire in its consequences, had been raised by his frightened cry, and heightened by his shameful rush, with his favourite child, towards what seemed to be the best means of escape—the boat. He must have heard his brother's cry of "Coward," and have felt its justice. No wonder he feared the man who had so marked and judged him, even though that judge was his brother. The silent group, hearing so unexpectedly the tale

of past shame, could only feel *pity* now; pity for the man who had paid so dearly, in mind and body, for his cowardice and desertion; pity also for the good old man, who on his death bed hesitated not to take upon himself the blame of having lost a brother's love.

Silently they joined in the prayer which was breathed solemnly through the dying lips, that both might be forgiven; and silently each determined that the tale of past shame should be forgotten, or at least buried with the past.

* * * *

“Vi!—Dicky!” The vicar’s thoughts are with his children again, and each softly stoops to kiss him. “Cecil!” The lieutenant’s broad hand gently covers his, and the vicar smiles, and whispers, “*Dicky* wasn’t blind! *Dicky* guessed in time to make me perfectly—*happy*.”

Once more a whispered prayer, which

Vi and Dicky alone can hear, and then, in silence, they all wait.

“Vi!” It is the old tone; and the old, queer fancies are at work again. “You remember, Vi? It was long ago; quite long ago! You remember when I was an angel?”

The tears rain heavily down, as bravely, but all in vain, Vi strives to speak. And the vicar continues, thoughtfully: “I was an angel, you know; and I—but you remember, Vi, don’t you?”

“Yes, darling; of course I do,” she forces herself to answer.

“Quite right, Vi,” murmurs the old man, in contented tones; “quite right. I remember it quite distinctly, too; but I haven’t much time—just now, Vi.” And a bright smile lit up his face, and remained fixed happily there, as he added, gently, “So you can—*tell them the story.*”

For him, time had ended, “merged in eternity.”

Now draw aside quickly. Too long already have we watched and waited for an ending which was so surely—*peace*.



CHAPTER VIII.

TWO years and more have passed, and who is the Vicar of Westfield now? Who but our old friend, Chaplain Clarke. Another vicar, a young cousin of Mr. Monkton's, held the appointment for a short time after Mr. Ormby's death; but, before he came into residence, he obtained—what he liked far better—preferment in a large town. And then the chaplain—having served her Majesty for twenty years—took his pension, and very much to his own astonishment, and Cecil's, Dicky's, Vi's, and everyone else's delight, was presented by Mr. Monkton with the living of Westfield.

Two years and more have passed, and who is mistress of the vicarage now? Who but *Vi* again. Virtually, *Vi*; nominally, Mrs. Clarke. Mrs. Clarke! Who then has tempted our jovial chaplain to forswear bachelorship, and has given to Miss *Vi* the power to once more rule the vicar, the vicarage, and everything appertaining to either or both of them? Who but that saucy young person's step-mamma, Mrs. Ormby, that was?

Poor Mr. Richard Ormby, shortly after his brother's death, had passed away also, in the small Southampton cottage. Not until the very last had he seemed conscious of the existence of his faithful partner—we cannot say wife—and *Vi* and Dicky; even then it had been but a glimmer of intelligence, but it was sufficient; and in the small retired cottage, with their respective children alone near them, Mr. and Mrs. Ormby had been married again.

But two years and more have passed since then, and not until three months ago had our chaplain prevailed, and Mrs. *Ormby* given up the Southampton cottage, Mrs. *Clarke* become nominal mistress of the old vicarage.

Vi was young when her poor father died, and could afford to wait, and—what is more to the point—rather *liked* waiting; girls do, when it's *safe*; dear possessive creatures. And so, she would not marry Cecil for eighteen months at least, she said; and then, when the eighteen months drew to a close, and it became sufficiently evident that her step-mother and herself would soon take up their respective commands at the vicarage, then she determined that “nothing should induce her” to give herself to him from any place but the old home.

And thus it happens that on a bridal morn, after an interval of two years and

more, we stand again beneath the old lime trees.

It is six a.m., and all around is still as when Vi and Dicky listened for the advent of the lieutenant and the village doctor.

At one minute past six a.m. the big gates swing back with a bang, thrust open by young Bill Dent, who, with some score of pals, form an advance guard for—merciful Heavens!—the village band. At seven a.m. the villagers have to be at their work; but what of that? A tune the bride and bridegroom *must* have.

At half-past four a.m. precisely, the bridegroom, located at Tremlett, had suffered. Mrs. Monkton, in fancy, hears the trombone still, and her spouse has not yet ceased to anathematize all makers of brass instruments, directing, at intervals, a specially solemn malediction, at the

fabricator of Sam Jennings' French horn. And now—ye gods preserve her!—it is the bride's turn.

The lusty cock crows heedlessly on, the venturesome rabbit gambols far out in the meadow, the conscious worm grovelingly eludes the vigilance of the early bird, Vi and Mary in concert raise that gruesome sound—a young lady's snore; and noiselessly the herald villagers, marshalled by Sam Jennings, take up their position beneath the maiden's window.

All is ready! crow on, lusty cock; gambol on, venturesome rabbit; grovel on, conscious worm; snore on—but oh! not so loudly—sleeping maidens, whilst you may.

A rattle! a bang! a crash! poor cock, rabbit, worm, and maidens.

Farewell crowings, gambols, grovellings, and snores; as slowly, and with awful blasts, the windy heralds summon to life

the bride, and with her the whole of sleeping nature anywhere handy—to the appropriate, stirring tune—“Christians, awake, salute the happy morn, etc. ;” whilst young Bill Dent and pals engage in muddy warfare for possession of the sole point of vantage attainable—old Alick’s “cowcumber bed.”

It should be explained that Sam Jennings—who in addition to playing the French horn, officiated as sexton of the parish, and was of a cheerful, go-ahead disposition far beyond his station—had proposed at the last half-yearly meeting of the band, that the first sounds emitted should resemble—as far as in the instruments lay—the airs of “Sally, come up,” or, “Sarah had a nice young man.” He had reason to love the name of Sarah, and he knew the tunes by heart. But his proposal met with but scant applause. To begin with, as Jos Billings remarked,

“the party’s name weren’t Sairey, and Jennings’ were a feul ;” a remark which young Bill Dent and pals—who had mostly felt the weight of the sexton’s cane on the previous Sunday—received with hideous mirth, shouted from an almost inaccessible window of the meeting house. “Moreover,” added the trombone man, the village clerk—finding Big Jos on his side, and entertaining feelings of deadly animosity to the French horn ; “moreover, think o’ playin toons like that upon—as one may say—the sacred hearth of an ecclesiastes minister, not to mention that it’s onpossible to learn quick toons like Mr. Sexton Jennings’ ‘ave mentioned, in the time afore us.”

Upon this, Jennings had muttered audibly, that he “didn’t care a pauper’s grave about sacred ‘earths, or ecclesiastes ;” but that argument of the trombone’s—that they would have to learn a

new tune, appeared conclusive ; and it was decided that, as they were best at hymns, "Christians, awake," could not fail to appeal to the sweet young bride's feelings, and after that, what could be better, as a wind-up, than "Art thou weary, art thou languid?" Besides, they played it so beautiful.

So, gentle reader, so, the Christians awoke, the happy morn was saluted—variously, and Vi, in a wrapper, put her head out of window to smile prettily, and thank the awakeners. Another window opened softly at the same time, another face—all unsmiling. peered cautiously out at that invading band, found their exact "range," and as cautiously retired. The Nipper was *not* to be married on that happy morn.

Then there was a slight pause below ; the cock crowed once more, a defiant though somewhat nervous crow ; the

rabbit ventured once more from his burrow, only to be chased back by young Bill Dent and pals; the worm issued forth once more, only to be secreted in the maw of the early and once more vigilant bird; Vi and Mary turned over just once more, and—the French horn winked knowingly at the second ditto and clarionet, and then the concluding portion of the entertainment commenced.

“Art thou weary, art thou languid?” melodiously enquire trombone and flute; and each finds an echo in the heart of the poor bride elect.

But what mockery is this?

The flute player, Big Jos, and the trombone man, pause for one moment; then, undismayed, redouble their exertions as an air—they have heard it before—discharges itself from the French horn, second horn and clarionet, and it

is crashed upon them by those perfidious instruments that “Sarah had a nice young man.”

Sam Jennings’ face, as he forces the glad tidings from his French horn, is a perfect picture; so also is that other one which had looked out before from an upper window, and which now “appears again.”

Sam had persuaded the other two mutineers that they could soon overpower the flute and trombone; but no! Big Jos and the clerk still hold their own, and now patience is exhausted; the flood gates are opened; and the pails full of the Nipper’s wrath descend in copious streams.

Sam’s “perfect picture” represented “Reproach: a study from nature;” and a “d—m” gushed from the horn as he turned and fled. The others were already in full retreat, but water could not alto-

gether quench their rival tunes, and the victory was still undecided, as the gurgling sounds died away in the distance, and Vi and Dicky, joined by sundry chums at their respective windows, tried in vain to distinguish which party was getting the best of it.

We leave the lime trees, and stroll away towards the railway station, sadder and wiser since witnessing this little luxury appertaining to country weddings.

8 a.m., and all at the vicarage enjoy a preliminary breakfast, during which Vi has to receive three several deputations, and respond to three several speeches, at the side door; deputies from the "mothers' meetings," the "Sunday school," and the "Young Men's Christianly Credulous society." Vi's response to this latter party was somewhat incoherent; "they would fidget about, and stare at one so, the great gabies"; and then, the grave encourag-

ing exclamations which proceeded from the Nipper, and five sub-lieutenant friends—who had come down specially from the R.N. College to act as groomsmen, and had kindly furnished a guard of honour on the occasion—were very trying.

11 a.m.: The bride is dressed ; and the bridegroom, supported, at a considerable distance, by his best man, Daintree, is looking miserable outside the vestry door of the parish church.

11.15: And a rustle of millinery in the church, a howl of delight from young Bill Dent and the churchyard party ; and the lovely bride, dressed in a—a—Oh, Lord ! Where am I ? Forgive the mistake ; the bride was *not* dressed ; that is —merciful heavens ! is there *no* way to escape the clothing description ? What they had of it, how they looked in it, and who made it ? I know of but one.

Reference—*full* reference. Therefore, for details, see the *Westfield Weekly Chronicle* for June 15th, 18—, and the article headed, “Marriage of Miss Vi Ormby, daughter of our late much - esteemed Vicar.”

Back to the lime trees, and under their shadow, with most of our old friends around us, eat the wedding breakfast.

“Most impressive,” murmurs Daintree, who is seated between Mary and Blanche Dutton. He refers to the ceremony just witnessed. “Most impressive,” he repeats, and Blanche, who has concealed a piece of cake for dreaming purposes, looks at him enquiringly. Blanche is four and twenty now, and has certainly been more than three times a bridesmaid. “I really think,” continued Daintree, thoughtfully, “that every naval man ought to marry, if it’s only to knock a widow’s pension out of the Admiralty. That is, he ought

to, unless they bring out a regulation, for bachelors to have the coin which would be devoured by their widows had they married. That would be *real* justice, for we ought to have more pay now, and should, too, if it wasn't for those wretched—I mean, for other fellows' widows. Maggie, sweet bridesmaid, I have already stolen three pieces of cake for your pillow to-night, and yet the original fragment remains on your plate *alone*. Tell me, gentle Maggie, How is this?"

Maggie pointed to a mouth, which has grown much in these last two years, smiled entreatingly, and received a fourth instalment.

And here, reader, amongst the cake and sugar, happy as we could have made her had time brought us on to her own marriage, we take our leave of Maggie.

"You were saying that you thought

of going in for matrimony!" murmured Blanche, prettily making crumbs. She also had found the ceremony most impressive, or believed that she had, and—she was four and twenty.

"No, no; I couldn't have said that," hastily replied Daintree. "What I meant was that every naval bachelor ought to marry his chum's wife, that is, widow. I mean, if a naval bachelor hasn't got a widow to leave, he ought to get his own widow's pension. That is,—I'm afraid I don't put it very clearly, but it would save a lot of bother, and—"

"Yes, yes, I know," interrupted Blanche, peevishly. "Every naval bachelor, according to you, should be his own widow."

"*Exactly.* That is,—but no matter." And the satisfied Daintree, convinced more than ever that Blanche was a deal too clever for him, turned to Mary, his next door neighbour, and gently whispered:

“I have just completed a little poem upon each of the only girls who have as yet taken rank as ‘apples of my eye.’ Would you care to hear about them?”

“No; don’t be stupid,” exclaimed Blanche hurriedly. “He will bring in my name, the wretch,” she thought.

But Mary was not to be denied now, and the Nipper, who was finding it all plain sailing with his bridesmaid, had heard the offer, and called loudly for “the Best-man’s Loves,” as far as he’s got.

Blanche subsided anxiously, but Daintree, in plaintive tones, objected to reveal in *public* “the innermost feelings, the sacred sap, of a still succulent though pith-punctured plant, which was doomed——” Here the lieutenant’s voice grew so melancholy, and the audience so impatient, that the remainder of his objection was lost.

Whatever it may have been, it proved to be not insurmountable, and Blanche

listened in fear and trembling to the tale
of Daintree's love punctures.

She was a Hindoo maiden,
 Lowly "caste;"
She was a Hindoo maiden,
 Highly fast;
To her knees, that Hindoo maiden
Was with anklets heav'ly laden,
 To her knees and past.
And from rings through each bronzed ear,
And each tiny hazel nostril,
Hung the amorous 'Krishna' dear,
Or some other godlike fossil.
Her "nose ring," oftentimes, I fear me,
I found *de trop*, yet loved her dearly.

She was an Arab maiden,
 Rare to see;
She was an Arab maiden,
 Bred on *Ghee*;
Through the lattice of the harem
Of her dad, I'd throw—she'd wear'em—
 Gems of Arabie.

Though in checkered "smalls" they clad thee.
Though thy "paicha" hid each feature;
Spite of Henna fair Bagdaddee,
I could love thee, white veil'd creature.
Her barb'rous veil, oftentimes, I fear me,
I found *de trop*, yet loved *her* dearly.

She was a 'Badian "maiden
Of the wash";
She was a 'Badian maiden,
And e' Gosh!
How I loved that maiden nigger;
Loved to hear her softly snigger,
"M'l like um 'B'nana squash.' "
In a muslin skirt, brand new,
And a "body"—well, say *scanty*;
She a sugar-cane would chew,
'Pon the doorstep of her shanty.
Her "chew-stick," oftentimes, I fear me,
I found *de trop*, yet loved *her* dearly.

'Twas one of Afric's maidens,
Sunny things!
'Twas one of Afric's maidens;
Hung in slings
'Pon her back that maiden carried—
Have I said she wasn't married?—
"Kinder black" bantlings.
Whilst upon her woolsome "nut";
'Tween the lips so richly pouted;
'Pon the first she'd poise her hut,
'Tween the last her "dudeen" sprouted.
Her "modest clay," oftentimes, I fear me,
I found *de trop*, yet loved *her* dearly.

"The others hadn't any peculiarities
worthy of remark, so they remain trea-

sured in this heart *alone*,” concluded Daintree.

“I think some parts of your verses are not particularly — nice,” said Mrs. Monkton.

It is impossible to please everybody, and Mrs. Monkton had hoped—as has been before remarked—to welcome Lady Blanche Mereweather as her step-son’s wife.

“Please do not revile me,” implored Daintree, in moving accents; “rather pity my misplaced affections. By Jove! now for the rice and slippers,” he broke off, and all prepared for the last onslaught.

Yes, the bride has rushed indoors—she still *rushes*—and now comes back ready for the first journey, and begins to say “Good-bye,” under the lime-trees.

Cecil stands near her at the carriage door, and Mary, who is close at hand, can

wish him happiness without a sigh of regret, can feel pleased that he is always to be a—brother.

It has been a hard fight; none the easier that the battle had to be waged in secret—unsuspected.

Dicky waits long for his kiss, for, of course, the last one is to be his. “Good bye, old Vi.” “Good bye, dear old boy.” And to both of them once more comes the thought of the dear old face so often missed to-day.

A shower of rice, a cloud of slippers, and, “Thank goodness, that’s over,” said Cecil, gliding bravely out of *his* corner.

“You’ll say the same about this when we get back.” And Vi—she doesn’t quite know what she ought to do, left all alone like this—emerges cautiously out of *hers*. She doesn’t—quite—know; but her waist is within reach now—she knows that—so

are her lips—she knows *that*. And strangeness and awkwardness rapidly disappear, as Cecil replies, “As you and I *have* or *intend to*.”

THE END.

THE tale is done, but bear with me for a few lines more. The tale has been told, but what has supplied the materials? Amongst other things, the improbable, the far-fetched, the anything-you-like, except impossible re-unions: What, but a panic—a panic at sea?

“Another accident!” exclaims the pater, laying down his paper, and seating himself at the breakfast table; “another passenger steamer run into in the channel, last night, and several people drowned. There are no particulars given yet, but as the *Times* says, of course there was a panic amongst the passengers.”

“Yes, of course there was, poor creatures!” murmurs the mater. And

Emily echoes, “Of course!—how dreadful!”

A panic truly! But does it occur to either pater, mater, or Emily, as they comfortably sip their coffee and nibble their toast, that the alarm might in many cases be avoided? that often and often it is the panic *alone* that supplies the sea with its victims?

“A panic, of course!” So will thousands remark concerning that same accident; and no one will gainsay the clever thousands sagacious judgment, as it is pompously delivered, and the self-appointed judges rest contented.

But does it occur to them that their contentment is a sin? a sin that has caused much, will cause more, needless loss of life? No.—God bless me, *no*. There was a panic, *of course*.

Suppose that in each large passenger steamer, besides an officer being—as is

generally, *not always*, the case—put in charge of each boat, the passengers also were told off, and not only told off, but shown their boat, just as they are their cabins, their bunks; or, suppose they were merely shown a place for which they could make, so that—as Mrs. Ormby says to Dicky—“they might know where to run or even where to *stand still*” in any sudden emergency, would panics at sea be less frequent?

“Confounded nuisance!” growls the pater.

“It seems a little *unnecessary*,” murmurs the mater.

“There can’t *really* be any danger,” exclaims Emily.

And so they drown; for there often *is* danger. The precaution *is* necessary; and it need not be “a confounded nuisance.”

It is no nuisance to be shown to which

boat you should run, or where you should stand, when your life and the lives of many dear to you may depend upon the knowledge.

It would be very little nuisance if occasionally, as in “fire quarters” on board H.M. troopships, all went to their respective stations. Five minutes is easily spared by sea travellers. The daily excitement, the amount to *do* is limited, and therefore who could growl at the cry of “Wolf?” Who would growl when—as is too often the case now—the enemy is actually found near at hand, and there is at all events *no panic*?

“Confounded nuisance,” growls the master of the steamer; “*I* don’t try any old woman’s games without orders, *I* know.”

But masters of steamers *can* be ordered. When will it be decided who is to order them?

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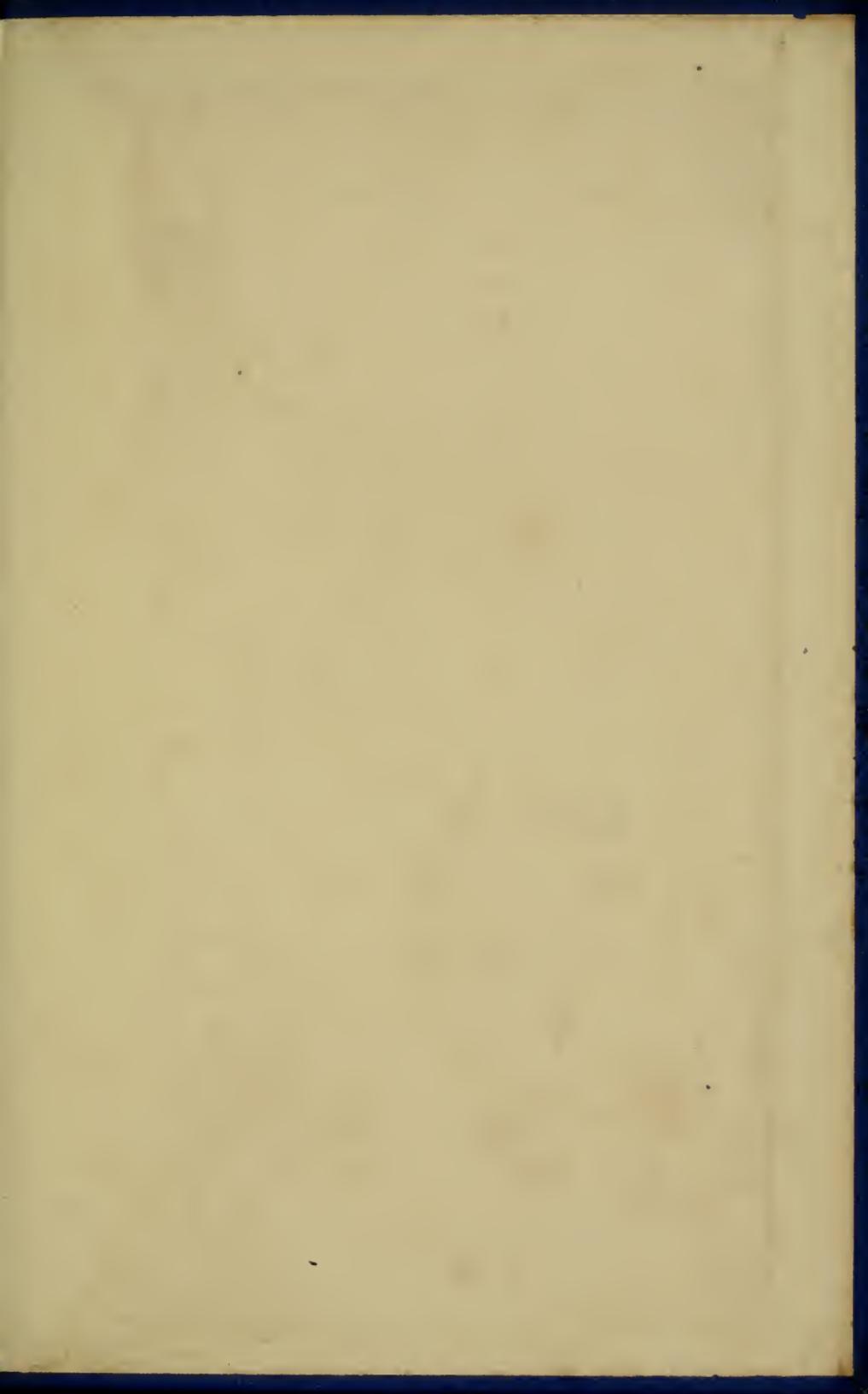
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